RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL'S

ANNUAL CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT &



SELF-ASSESSMENT

2025 - 2026

This document contains information about the planning and progress of the Council's priorities which are the Council's Well-being Objectives as required by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and also the Council's summary Self-Assessment as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

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

RHONDDA CYNON TAF

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SECTION 1

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ANNUAL CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT & SELF-ASSESSMENT 2025-2026

The Council serves an area in the South Wales Valleys covering 424 square kilometres, stretching from the Brecon Beacons National Park in the north to the Capital City of Cardiff in the south. The range of services delivered is diverse in nature and complexity - from maintaining green spaces, collecting recycling and refuse, delivering meals on wheels, educating our young people and caring for those that require support to remain independent. The terrain of the county borough is equally diverse. Services are delivered within the community and from a significant number of locations, ranging from offices to depots and frontline buildings.

This report incorporates our annual self-assessment for 2025/26 which is a requirement of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 as well as a summary of our performance which is a requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

When reporting our performance for the year and conducting our annual self-assessment, we have been honest and have identified areas for improvement. Our embedded service self-evaluation process has helped us to demonstrate a commitment to continually reviewing our arrangements to answer the key questions in respect of how well we are performing, how we know and what needs to improve.

Based on the review undertaken and the evidence in place**, *'the Council's arrangements have provided the basis to maintain the organisation's financial stability and resilience, during a continued period of significant financial pressures and constrained funding, through robust planning, prioritisation and management of scarce resources. This position was underpinned by sound scrutiny and decision-making processes and well-established self-assessment arrangements, and supported Corporate Plan priority areas, wider service delivery and improved outcomes for service users'.*** This overall opinion is consistent with the feedback from the Panel Performance Assessment.

A small number of areas for improvement have been identified to further strengthen existing processes. Accordingly, based on the self-assessment process the Council has demonstrated that it has exercised its functions effectively; used its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and that governance arrangements were effective for securing the above.

Our annual self-assessment has identified areas for improvement and these areas will be monitored throughout 2026/27 as part of the Council's performance management arrangements.

If you have any comments or views about this document, or would like more information, please contact the Council's Performance Team.

SECTION 2

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL



DELIVERY AGAINST OUR WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES DURING 2025/26

ANNUAL CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT & SELF-ASSESSMENT 2025-2026

DELIVERY AGAINST OUR WELL-BEING OBJECTIVES DURING 2025/26

(OUR CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT)

Before we go into the detail of our annual self-assessment (Section 3), in this Section we have provided a summary of the Council's performance during 2025/26. Regular updates were provided during the year in the form of our quarterly performance reports. Our detailed annual performance report for 2025/26 was presented to Cabinet at its meeting held on 13th July 2026 and then to Overview and Scrutiny, also on 13th July 2026.

During the year, reporting arrangements continued to align with the Well-being of Future Generations (WFG) framework by demonstrating the application of the five ways of working and evaluating progress against the seven national well-being goals. The 'health check' style of our annual report focuses on our stated Outcomes which are supported by quantitative and qualitative data, along with case studies that aim to demonstrate the impact of our work.

It is not the intention of this Section to reproduce the full detail reported in the end of year annual report, instead a focused summary of delivery against our Well-being Objectives and the supporting outcomes that are set out within our Corporate Plan is provided. The risks to delivering our Well-being Objectives are embedded into our performance reporting arrangements and are reviewed and scrutinised throughout the year, for ease of reference a copy of the Council's Strategic Risk Register as at the end of 2025/26 is provided.

The information presented below provides a summary of the progress we made during 2025/26.

PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES

2025/26 DELIVERY

OVERALL STATEMENT OF PROGRESS:

For the 8 outcomes we set out to achieve in our Corporate Plan, we have made…

- positive progress against 5 outcomes;
- good progress although slower than anticipated against 1 outcome; and
- mixed progress against 2 outcomes.

More detailed information for each outcome is set out below.

Evaluation of progress against outcomes we expect to see by 2030.

Attendance, exclusions and attainment in all our schools will continue to show strong progress, compare favourably with other parts of Wales, with improved educational outcomes, work and training opportunities for our school leavers.

Progress in this area has been mixed. Outcomes improved at both Key Stage 4 and 5, both in absolute terms and relative to the Wales average. However, despite improvements, attendance levels require on-going prioritised attention, particularly for vulnerable learners, and too many young people are currently not in Education, Employment or Training.

Both primary and secondary phase attendance increased in academic year 2024/25, with primary attendance increasing 0.7 percentage points to 92.3% and secondary attendance increasing by 1.2 percentage points to 88.0%. Attendance at both primary and secondary level remains below the Welsh Average, but for both phases the gap was reduced. However, data to the end of Spring term 2025/26 suggests this improvement has not been sustained, with a slight reduction in attendance levels in RCT which mirrors the picture across Wales where attendance levels have fallen nationally. Attendance for free school meal pupils improved in academic year 2024/25 and the attendance gap between free school meal pupils and non-free school meal pupils reduced by 0.5 percentage points. However, it remains well below that of other pupils, with a gap of 10.5 percentage points in RCT at secondary level. This is a similar to the picture nationally, where there is an attendance gap of 10 percentage points.

Both fixed term and permanent exclusions reduced considerably in the secondary phase for academic year 2024/25. Fixed term exclusions in secondary phase reduced to 172.9 per 1,000 pupils, compared to 195.09 in academic year 2023/24. Permanent exclusions showed a significant reduction to 1.59 per 1,000 pupils, compared to 3.46 the previous academic year. Primary exclusions showed a slight increase in fixed term exclusions per 1,000 pupils, from 19.06 to 22.92. However, this reflects a reduction in the number of students on roll as the actual number of fixed term exclusions reduced from 385 to 364. No pupils were permanently excluded from primary school.

A-level outcomes improved by 4.3 percentage points for A*-C (74.4%) and 1.2 percentage points for A* - E (97.0%) in 2025 compared to 2024, although A*-A (23.3%) decreased 0.2 percentage points.

RCT performance remains below the Welsh average, but the gap has narrowed at all grades. RCT is now 0.2 percentage points below the national average for A*/A, 2.8 percentage points below for A*-C and 0.5 percentage points below for A*-E. Key Stage 4 (GCSE or equivalent) attainment data for academic year 2024/25 showed improvement across all key indicators. The Capped 9 score of 370.9 was above the Wales average and Numeracy (36.0) and Science (35.8) scores are now in line with the Wales average. The Skills challenge certificate (24.5), literacy (38.4) and 5A*/A (15.3) indicators remain below the Wales average, but the gap has narrowed across all 3 indicators. Of 17 schools inspected in academic year 24/25, 2 were in 'follow up' categories.

There has been a reduction in the Learners in year 11 (1.7%) and 12 (1.1%) who become NEET. Year 11 NEETs are lower than the Welsh average. However, this trend reverses in year 12 where NEETs are slightly above the Wales average. There has been an increase of learners becoming NEET in year 13 (5.6%), which is also above the Wales average. Learner voice indicates there is an increase in those opting to take a gap year after studying.

Families will have greater resilience: fewer children will be 'looked after' in our care and will have improved life chances.

In line with our Children Looked After Prevention Strategy, progress has been positive. We have continued to provide support to families as early as possible to increase resilience and prevent the need for statutory services. In 2025/26, the Resilient Families Service engaged with a total of 1,131 families, 86% of these families (978) had improved resilience following completion of their work. This is slightly less than in 2024/25 when 88% (1,034) reported improved resilience. Of those children and young people referred to Resilient Families Service, only 3.4% required an intervention from statutory Children's Services. These figures highlight the service's ability to consistently deliver positive outcomes for families.

We have continued to focus on supporting families to ensure that only those children for whom there is no safe alternative become looked after. The number of Children Looked After has continued to fall, from 611 at the end of March 2025 to 586 at the end of March 2026. There has also been a reduction in the number of Children on the Child Protection Register from 309 at the end of March 2025 to 297 at the end of March 2026. As in previous years, we have carried out an annual service user survey which asked a sample of children and young people, who had a care and support plan on the day the sample was drawn, how they feel about the care and support they receive. In total, 89 children completed the survey, compared to 117 in 2024/25, a continuing decline in response rate. Overall responses to the survey were positive, with all respondents stating that they 'felt safe where they lived' (100%) and the vast majority stating that they 'felt well cared for' (99%) and 'live in a home that they are happy in' (99%).

More of our residents will use the opportunities available across the County Borough to keep active, healthy and well and reduce their risk of disease and ill health.

In line with our Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, progress has been positive. The number of residents using our sport and leisure facilities continues to grow with more than 3 million visits recorded in 2025/26. The Council's Leisure for Life membership scheme remains stable year on year with almost 11,650 memberships.

Results from our Leisure Centre Customer Attitude Survey 2024/25 show 99% of customers feel positively after exercise, 89% of customers report feeling physically better after their visit, 77% of customers report having better self-esteem after their visit, 62% of customers state that exercise helps their mental health & wellbeing and 66% of customers visit our centres 3 or more times a week.

Children in our care will be looked after closer to their home and stay connected to families, friends and communities.

We have continued to focus on making sure that young people are looked after closer to home. Currently, 71% of children who are looked after currently reside in RCT (417/586) compared to 73% in 2024/25. Of the 106 placements that began in 2025/26, 76% of children were placed in RCT (closer to home) compared to 60% in 2024/25. We have also increased the number of children in 'not for profit' settings, in line with Welsh Government (WG) Policy, from 20 to 22 at March 2026.

Despite continued efforts to increase the number of RCT Foster Carers and this continuing to be a priority, the number of RCT Foster Carers has slightly reduced again, 243 on the 31st March 2026 compared to 248 on the same date the previous year (and is a position that is being experienced more widely across Wales). However, we have continued to see a positive increase in the number of Special Guardianship Orders, from 333 in March 2025 to 342 in March 2026. Special Guardianship Orders provide a stable, long-term home and an alternative to a child being placed in the care of Children's Services.

Better joined up services across health and social care so that people get the right care in the right place at the right time.

Progress continues to be made to implement an urgent health and social care community response although slower than we planned. Health data around Pathways of Care Delays (POCD) have shown an increase in the number of people experiencing delays whilst awaiting social worker allocation (56 in 2025/26 compared to 43 in 2024/25), however, a significant reduction in delays due to awaiting the start of a new care home package (87 in 2025/26 compared to 279 in 2024/25) which demonstrates the positive impact of the retendered home care contracts in 2024/25. People experiencing a delay as a result of the availability of care homes, both residential (35 in 2025/26 compared to 50 in 2024/25) and nursing (31 in 2025/26 compared to 108 in 2024/25) have reduced. Overall performance for both POCD and length of stay have improved consistently during this financial year for Rhondda Cynon Taf residents, attributable in the main to the home first approach and the performance of the home care providers. Work will continue to improve pathways of care to support on-going improvement in the timeliness of service delivery.

As in previous years, we carried out an annual service user survey which asked a sample of adults aged 18 and over, who had a care and support plan on the day the sample was drawn, how they feel about the care and support that they receive. This year 300 people completed the survey compared to 496 people in 2024/25, a continuing decline in response rate. Overall responses to the survey were positive, remaining consistently high compared to previous years, with most respondents stating that they 'felt safe where they lived' (89%) and 'lived in a home that supports their wellbeing' (91%).

Fewer people affected by/experiencing domestic violence and addiction.

Progress in this area has been positive for people engaging with our services. Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) are specialist domestic abuse professionals who work with victims of domestic abuse at high risk of serious harm. Client outcomes for 2025/26 show 96% of clients reported feeling safer since intake, 84% had experienced a reduction in physical and sexual abuse and 73% had experienced a reduction in harassment and stalking and/or jealous, controlling and coercive behaviours.

More people have accessed treatment services for substance misuse compared to last year (3,355 treatment starts compared to 3,188 in 2024/25) and 86% started treatment within 20 days of referrals, which exceeds the WG target of 80%. 87.5% reported reduction/unchanged substance misuse from start of treatment, which exceeds the WG target of 86.5%. Less individuals have engaged with targeted outreach where harm reduction services have been provided (690 individuals compared to 781 in 2024/25).

More affordable homes and fewer empty homes.

Progress in this area has been positive, with a decrease in the overall number of empty homes. Council tax records indicate 2,687 private sector homes have been vacant for 6 months or more at 1st April 2026, compared to 2,699 the previous year, and a significant decrease since the introduction of the Council's Empty Homes Strategies in April 2017 (3,556). 178 empty properties (6.6%) were brought back into use in 2025/26, a decrease from 240 the previous year. However, this represents significant progress in tackling long term problematic empty homes which are reducing in number. The rate of new affordable housing units delivered increased to 16 per 10,000 households (from 14.3 per 10,000 households in 2024/25), with 168 affordable homes delivered.

Fewer homes in RCT will have energy ratings below Energy Performance Certificate D.

Progress in this area is positive. 85% of homes in RCT now have energy ratings of D or above, an increase of 7.27 percentage points from the baseline data of 77.73%. Data is calculated for a rolling 10-year period based on published energy performance certificates.

WORK & BUSINESS

2025/26 DELIVERY

OVERALL STATEMENT OF PROGRESS:

For the 6 outcomes we set out to achieve in our Corporate Plan, we have made...

- positive progress against 2 outcomes;
- mixed progress against 3 outcomes; and
- further evidence is required to establish progress against one outcome.

More detailed information for each outcome is set out below.

Evaluation of progress against outcomes we expect to see by 2030.

Town Centres with thriving businesses that help support the economy

Delivery in this area has been positive, but its impact is yet to translate into some key outcome data. Following the successful delivery of projects, for example, in Pontypridd, the Muni Arts Centre and public realm at the former Bingo Hall site in the previous year, a range of further projects are in development or underway, including the redevelopment of Rock Grounds in Aberdare, the former M&S site in Pontypridd and the demolition of the old Police station in the Northern Gateway area of Pontypridd. A Business improvement District for Tonypandy has been established, and a new town centre strategy has been produced in collaboration with the local and business communities.

Although it is too soon to fully evidence the impact of all of our work, independent evaluations of projects including the Llys Cadwyn development, Ynysangharad Park improvements and Robertstown Business Units have demonstrated the positive impact of these projects. In the first 12 months of operation, Y Muni has received over 10,000 visitors to over 200 events. However, footfall rates across our town centres show a mixed picture, with increased footfall in Pontypridd and Porth but a slight decline in Aberdare and Treorchy in comparison to the previous year. Most recent vacancy rate surveys (May 2026) show continuing positive trend in Aberdare where vacancies have continued to reduce to 15.63%. Vacancy rates remain high in Porth and have also increased in Treorchy. There has also been a slight increase in vacancy rates in Pontypridd, however at 11.11% the town still compares favourably with national benchmarks and maintains a strong offer of independent retailers.

Public transport infrastructure and systems are more joined up and encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport

Progress in this area has been difficult to quantify. A range of reduced fare schemes operated on bus services in RCT between April and December 2025, including £1 child single fares and £1.50 adult single fares, resulting in 501,433 subsidised journeys taken. 68 enhancements were made to bus stops to improve access and user experience, including raised kerbs and new shelters. Design and construction were progressed on a range of active travel schemes including Phase 5 of the Rhondda Fach active travel route, with work paused on the Cynon Trail – Penywaun Slip and will be progressed in 2026/27. Work is on-going to further develop the suite of information to help assess the impact of our work.



More accessible publicly available Electric Vehicle charging points at Council locations supporting low carbon travel

Progress in this area has been positive, with an increase in electric vehicle infrastructure delivered. 61 charging points have been installed at Council premises in 2025/26, increasing the total to 164. In parallel, the Council's fleet now contains 54 ULEV vehicles, 11.92% of the total fleet.

More businesses supported to develop, modernise and grow

Delivery in this area has been positive, however the impact of our work has been mixed. Businesses continued to be supported through grant programmes (134 compared to 136 the previous year) with more full-time equivalent jobs created or safeguarded (58.26 compared to 48.93). We also grew the number of carbon reduction measures included in grant supported programmes (from 5 to 9). The rate of business start-ups decreased to 10.1 as a percentage of active enterprises. This is still in line with the Wales average, which has also shown a slight decrease, although both are below the UK average. The rate of business closures improved to 11.7 as a percentage of active enterprises and although this is still above the national average rate (9.7), the gap has decreased.

More people in RCT will have the skills they need to find and progress in work

Progress in this area has been mixed. 48 apprentices and 12 graduates completed their 2-year apprenticeship programmes with the Council in August 2025, with 94% of apprentices and 83% of graduates securing employment following their programmes. Employment support and skills programmes were delivered throughout 2025/26, targeting a variety of clients including vulnerable customer groups, in-house staff, and young people.

1,565 people engaged in employment support, with 586 job entries and 1,007 people completing training or gaining qualifications. However, the percentage of people in RCT who are unemployed rose to 6.0% in 2025/26. The percentage of economically active people decreased to 69.3%, remaining below the Welsh average of 76%.

More people will visit RCT from outside the County Borough and enjoy the cultural, nature, activity and adventure tourism RCT has to offer

Progress in this area has been positive. The most recent data shows an increase in annual visits to tourism attractions in RCT to 2.346M (2024 data), compared to 2.197M the previous year. Preliminary local data suggests another positive year for visitors in 2025; final figures will be available in late summer.



NATURE & THE ENVIRONMENT

2025/26 DELIVERY

OVERALL STATEMENT OF PROGRESS:

For the 6 outcomes we set out to achieve in our Corporate Plan, we have made...

- positive progress against 5 outcomes: and
- further evidence is required to establish progress against one outcome.

More detailed information for each outcome is set out below.

Evaluation of progress against outcomes we expect to see by 2030.

Improved air quality across the County Borough.

Progress in this area has been positive. In 2024/25, RCT initially had 16 air quality management areas (AQMAs) with historically elevated levels of NO2 emissions. As a result of demonstrated sustained compliance to the annual mean AQO (Air Quality Objective) for NO2, there are currently 6 AQMAs which is a significant reduction. Average NO2 levels across RCT were 22.1, a 10.5% decrease on a rolling 12-month period compared to a 5.1% decrease in 2024/25.

People and communities able to keep active and well in our green spaces.

Delivery in this area has been positive. We have continued to focus on improving and maintaining our green spaces across RCT with four public green spaces and parks awarded the Green Flag Award 2025 for the second year running: Aberdare Park, Dare Valley Country Park, Taff's Well Park and Ynysangharad War Memorial Park. The Council continues to encourage residents to keep active in our green spaces with increasing numbers participating in outdoor physical activities compared to the previous year. Nearly 475,000 visits were made to our outdoor grass pitches and nearly 710,000 to our 3G pitches in 2025/26. Over 36,000 people participated in free physical activities in our RCT Outdoor Facilities including Park Run and visits to our paddling pools.

Wildlife will thrive on positively managed council land.

Progress in this area has been difficult to quantify in the short term. 5 new living landscape sites have been added to the network in 2025/26 and there is now a total of 64 sites across RCT. The long-standing integration of biodiversity into the planning system has been a major success, from initial enquiries through to long term management, via S.106 agreements. Several of the Council's managed sites now feature as part of the Living Landscape project and provide 'Nature on Your Doorstep' opportunities for local residents and businesses.

Communities supported to do more to reduce, reuse and recycle and live sustainably.

Delivery in this area has been positive. 78,742.82 tonnes (79,214.72 tonnes in 2024/25) of municipal waste was collected and recycled and/or prepared for reuse which represents 72.01% of the municipal waste collected which is an increase compared to 71.11% in 2024/25. 0.78% of waste was sent to landfill which is a decrease from 1.65% in 2024/25. Overall municipal waste collected has reduced by 2,056.66 tonnes (from 111,403 tonnes in 2024/25 to 109,346.33 tonnes). 15,607.90

tonnes of food waste has been collected, an increase of 1,726.30 tonnes compared to last year (13,881.60 tonnes). 1,115.09 tonnes of small electrical items have been collected this year, an increase of 32.16 tonnes compared to last year (1,082.93 tonnes). Food sustainability has been encouraged and supported amongst residents in RCT with 10 new allotment plots completed and a further 20 plots rejuvenated for re-use.

People enjoying clean streets, free from environmental crime.

Progress in this area is positive. The average number of working days taken to clear fly tipping incidents has significantly reduced to 4.1 days compared to 7.49 days in Q4 in 2024/25. 100% of all reported graffiti was removed within target which is an increase from the previous year of 95.74%. 100% of highways and relevant land inspected were of a high or acceptable standard of cleanliness which is the same as last year.

Increased green energy produced from 'renewables'.

Progress in this area has been positive. There has been a significant increase in renewable energy generated from Council land or buildings from 2.74 MW in 2024/25 to 10.09 MW in 2025/26 which shows a substantial increase from the 2021/22 baseline of 2 MW. Renewable energy generated by the Coed Ely solar farm has directly contributed to this figure.



CULTURE, HERITAGE & WELSH LANGUAGE

2025/26 DELIVERY

OVERALL STATEMENT OF PROGRESS:

For the 6 outcomes we set out to achieve in our Corporate Plan, we have made...

- positive progress against 4 outcomes;
- mixed progress against 1 outcome: and
- further evidence is required to establish progress against one outcome.

More detailed information for each outcome is set out below.

Evaluation of progress against outcomes we expect to see by 2030.

More people are confident to use Welsh in their everyday lives and more learners access Welsh medium education.

Progress in this area has been positive. In line with the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, there has been an increase in the percentage of children in Welsh Medium Education in both nursery/pre-nursery (24.07%) and Year One (20.36%), although due to a drop in pupil numbers overall the number of learners remains static. In line with our Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-27, we continue to promote and support the use of the Welsh language across our services. Positive work to increase staff skill levels, including the Guaranteed Interview Scheme, has seen an increase in the percentage of Welsh speakers in the workforce. Currently 10.51% of the Council workforce are fluent in the Welsh language, 2.51% at Level 4 and 2.27% at Level 3. All these show an increase from previous year's data, bringing us close to our target of 12.4% of Welsh speakers in the workforce (in line with the percentage in the community).

People feel that they 'belong' in their communities, get along well and treat each other with respect.

We do not have Local Authority data to demonstrate progress against this outcome at this time, as access to previously available national data has not been available. The National Survey for Wales, operated by the Welsh Government, has not published any data at a Local Authority level for 2024/25 as sample sizes were too small. However, data has been provided at a regional Cwm Taf Morgannwg level and this shows that 73% of people 'feel that they belong to their local area' which is in line with the Welsh Average (36% strongly agree, 37% tend to agree) and 56% of people have a sense of community, which is slightly below the Welsh Average of 57.8%. In 2025/26, the National Survey has again not been carried out, as Welsh Government have been changing contractor and developing a new, fully online version of the survey. The survey is resuming for the 2026 to 2027 survey year, and we hope to have access to further Local Authority data in Autumn 2027.



More opportunities for residents of all ages and backgrounds to 'connect' through arts, libraries and community activities and events.

Progress has been positive with an increase in visits to our libraries in 2025/26 compared to 2024/25. There were 925,323 physical and virtual visits in 2025/26 compared to 818,108 in 2024/25. Our Library Service Customer Satisfaction Survey 2025 also tells us that 96% of respondents agree that the library has had a positive impact on their life and wellbeing.

Following the introduction of 'Community Conversations' with residents engaging in community venues, warm spaces and active community groups, of a total of 140 respondents, 97% agreed that 'My social connections/ friendships have increased', 84% agreed that 'I feel more empowered to influence decisions that affect me' and 97% agreed that 'I feel my mental health and wellbeing has improved'.

Opportunities for residents to promote and express their culture, heritage and share commitment to sustainable lives through a thriving arts community.

Progress in this area is mixed. Despite there being a decrease in the number of art organisations supported this year, the service has worked collaboratively with the Sherman Theatre on 3 productions. There has also been a slight decline in visits to our arts events with 38,425 individuals attending arts events compared to 38,697 in 2024/25. The appointment of the new Artist in Service, to grow community artwork making it community owned as audience, subject and co-author, and the recognition of our Artist in Service project by the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner are examples of positive outcomes this year.

More people identify with the history that shaped the Rhondda Cynon Taf of today and have a connection with the past.

Progress has been positive with a wide range of opportunities for residents to engage with local heritage, and strong visitor numbers to our key heritage sites (for example, 109,971 visits to Rhondda Heritage Park). To ensure a connection with the past, we continue to digitise, preserve and maintain war memorials in RCT, with the support of volunteers from the community. We recognise that we need to do more to understand the views of our residents and are developing a new Community Health and Wellbeing Impact Evaluation Framework to help us do this.

An Armed Forces community is supported by the wider community.

Progress has been positive with an increased range of support for veterans including the new Pontypridd Hub for Veterans at Calon Taf. The quality of support from the 'Valley Veterans' group this year has been recognised by the 'King's Award for Voluntary Services'. More veterans have also taken up our discounted Corporate Leisure for Life membership (from 16 to 26 this year), but our free membership has declined slightly from 267 to 264. We recognise this area could be strengthened with additional data.

SECTION 3

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL



OUR ANNUAL SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT AND PANEL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

ANNUAL CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT & SELF-ASSESSMENT 2025-2026

Overview

The Performance and Governance duties outlined in Part 6, Chapter 1 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 are about strengthening and empowering local government… '*defining principal councils as self-improving organisations through a system based on self-assessment and panel performance assessment*'.
Among other things, the Act requires Public Bodies to:

- keep performance under review
- consult on performance and
- report on performance, producing a self-assessment report in respect of each financial year.

The Act sets out that *'A council must produce a self-assessment report in respect of each financial year. The report must set out its conclusions on the extent to which it met the performance requirements during that year, and any actions it intends to take, or has already taken, to increase the extent to which it is meeting the performance requirements'*. This document aims to deliver this duty.

The Corporate self-assessment is a comprehensive assessment of the organisation and not a detailed assessment of the performance of each service portfolio. The self-assessment aims to provide a platform for assurance and improvement and in doing so help to ensure that we deliver the best outcomes for the residents that we serve.

This is our fifth self-assessment, and we continue to learn and develop our approach from our previous self-assessments. We seek to learn from the shared knowledge emerging from other Councils and feedback from Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association and the Council's Independent Regulators.

Within all parts of this self-assessment, we aim to make the best use of the data and information already available within the public domain, for example, reports to relevant Council committees, Policies, plans and strategies. This approach reduces the repetition of information and provides the evidence required as set out within the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The Act requires the Council to keep under review the extent to which it is meeting the 'performance requirements', this is the extent to which:

1. **it is exercising its functions effectively;**
2. **it is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and**
3. **its governance is effective for securing the above.**

Whilst the Act sets out the duty to undertake and report an annual self-assessment, it does not provide a structure to either the process or the annual report, and the Act specifically states that each organisation should determine its own approach. To help us through the process it is useful to understand what self-assessment means at its simplest level.

The following questions help guide us through the process of self-assessment:

1. **How well are we doing?**
2. **How do we know?**
3. **What and how can we do better?**

The framework that the Council has adopted and therefore the structure of our self-assessment is based upon the following areas:

- **An overview and the outcome of our Panel Performance Assessment that was completed during October 2025.**
- **Our performance management framework – how it all fits together, with a focus on self-evaluation.**
- **Our assessment of our 'core activities' – this section includes the detail of our assessment and areas where we think we can improve on where appropriate.**

Panel Performance Assessment

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 Act requires the Council to make arrangements for an independent Panel to assess the extent to which the Council is meeting the performance requirements, this is formally defined in the Act as a 'Panel Performance Assessment' (PPA).

Our PPA took place in October 2025.

Our Panel was made up of independent members with sufficient knowledge and experience to undertake their duties, including the former Chief Executive of Neath Port Talbot Council (Panel Chair), the Chief Executive of Bridgend Council, a Director of a Charity and the Leader of Monmouthshire County Council.

In addition to reviewing the extent to which the Council is meeting its performance requirements, the Council identified the following areas where peer insight would be valued as part of the assessment:

- Demonstrating impact and outcomes for our communities
- Building Community Resilience

The Panel's report was considered by the Governance & Audit Committee on the 24th November 2025, Council on 28th January 2026 and was then published and circulated as required in the Act.

Overall, the Panel concluded that:

> ***Rhondda Cynon Taf is a good, well run and ambitious Council, focused on improving the lives of its citizens. The Council demonstrated that it has a strong track record of delivery underpinned by an ethos of continuous improvement. The Council is working to better understand the impact and outcomes of its work, moving from a service-focused approach to one which is person centred, and which will help to deliver its ambition to strengthen communities' resilience. The panel further concluded that the Council is exercising the functions against the performance duties within the Local Government and Elections Act 2021.***

The Assessment identified a number of strengths and areas of innovation, including recognition of:

- mature political and officer leadership with a 'Team RCT' approach;
- the maturity and impact of performance management arrangements and a clear 'golden thread' in terms of approach to service planning;
- strong financial management and budgetary planning;
- an inclusive, collaborative approach to partnership working;
- embedding of social value requirements into the Council's supply chain;
- well supported scrutiny and assurance functions;
- an inclusive and supportive culture; and
- clear and effective governance;

The Panel reported that the Council is well placed to shift practice to support the empowerment and agency of individuals and communities, and identified the following areas for further improvement:

1. **Resources**
   The Council is encouraged to take the time needed to ground its approach in evidence and to give early consideration to the role that workforce, digital, data and communications will need to play to enable the delivery of the changes that it wants to achieve.
2. **Demonstrating Impact and Outcomes**
   The Council is encouraged to take forward this process to develop the skills and capacities to enable it to:
   - Work with communities and partners to design their impact and outcome measures at community and County Borough levels.
   - Measure how impact and outcomes vary across demographics and geography.
   - To evaluate the extent to which existing engagement approaches provide for and encourage participation and involvement.
3. **Building Community Resilience**
   The Council is encouraged to:
   - Invest time in learning from practice elsewhere and involve its communities and partners in developing a shared understanding of community resilience.
   - Understand and establish the key enabling resources, such as data, workforce, communication and engagement method, digital systems, to support the change programme.
   - Identify opportunities to test, learn and iterate the approach prior to scaling up.
   - Take a whole Council approach to the change, ensuring that each part of the Council understands how it needs to adapt to bring about the cultural change that is sought.

The Council's response to the PPA outlined the steps to deliver the recommendations. These are summarised below:

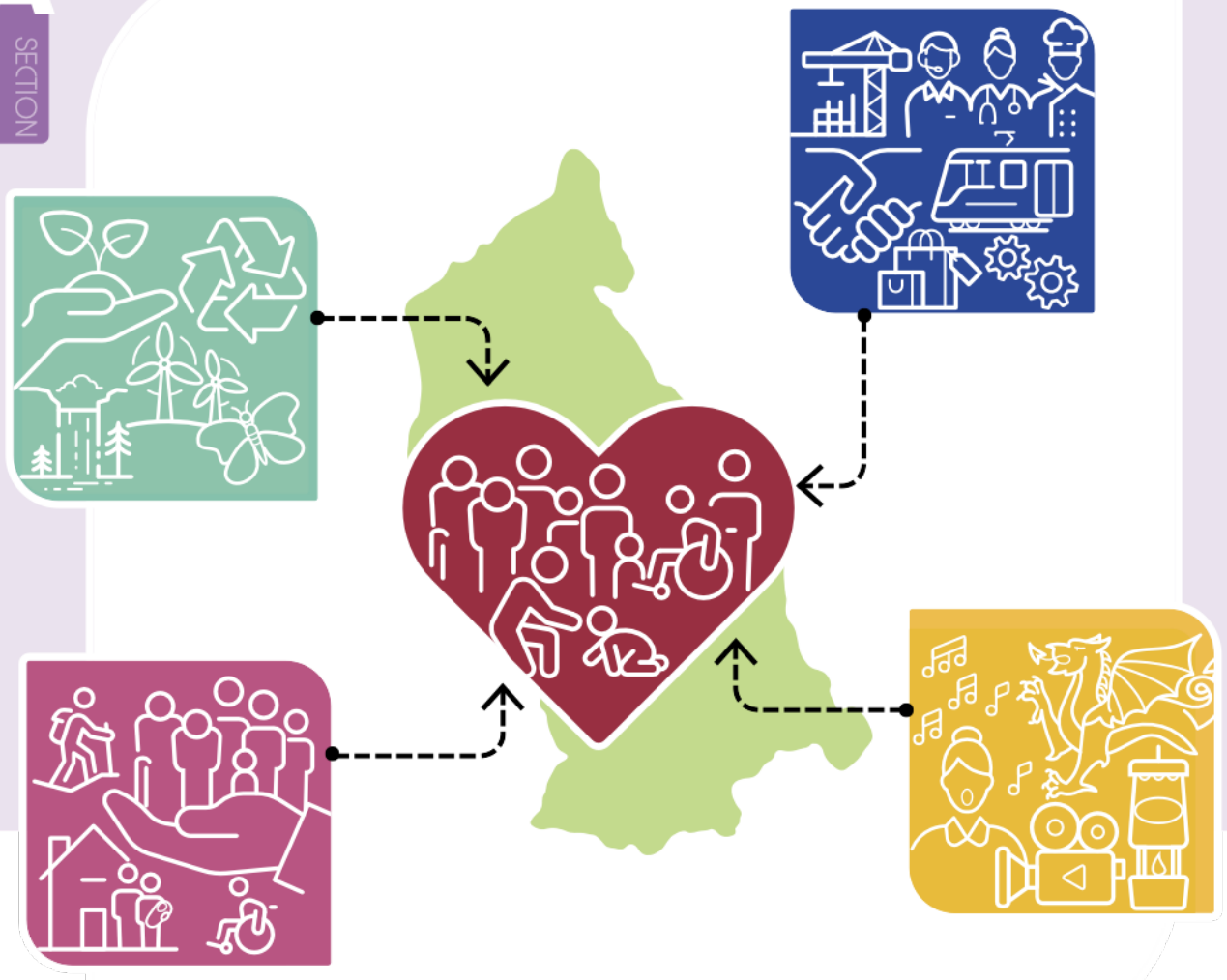
- Delivery of the Council's updated Transformation Plan, which focusses on embedding four key pillars of Community Resilience, Prevention, Customer/Resident Experience and Efficient, Effective and Optimised Use of Resources, across all Council services.
- Continued development of the Council's Key Strategies, including Digital and Workforce, which are key to supporting the delivery of service transformation.
- Further Strengthening approaches to measuring Outcomes and Impact and delivery of the Council's Involvement Strategy.

- Articulating our ‘Council Commitment’ to establishing and supporting a new relationship with the community and voluntary sector, through close collaboration with Interlink RCT and identifying existing research and good practice through the Health Determinants Research Collaboration.

These steps are long term and our initial plans to deliver them have been developed over the months following the assessment. Our continued progress against the PPA recommendations will be monitored through the Council’s Performance Management Framework.

3A SECTION

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL



OUR PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

HOW IT ALL FITS TOGETHER, WITH A FOCUS ON SELF-EVALUATION

ANNUAL CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT & SELF-ASSESSMENT 2025-2026

Our Corporate Plan sets out the outcomes the Council wants to achieve with the aim of delivering better social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes for our communities. Delivery of the Corporate Plan is underpinned by our Performance Management Framework; the purpose of the framework is to set out the arrangements in place to help deliver the intended outcomes, manage our risks and provide accountability for delivery.

Detailed priority plans are in place to support the delivery of our Well-being Objectives (these are our priorities within our Corporate Plan) and these plans aim to manage the strategic risks to achieving our objectives and contain milestones, actions, and measures. Service delivery plans are also in place, and are supported by a wide suite of policies, strategies and working arrangements.

Accountability in respect of delivering the Corporate Plan and managing our resources effectively is delivered through the reporting and scrutiny functions of the Council. To find out why, when and how our performance is monitored, please take a look at the performance pages of our website.

In the PPA final report, the Panel noted:

> ***...a clear 'Golden Thread' from the corporate plan, the medium-term financial plan to service planning, with appropriate challenge from the Chief Executive and senior elected members at the corporate level. The panel considered the Council to be self-aware with a mature approach to the way it approaches change.***

To support the Council's performance culture, the Performance Management Framework includes timely and proportionate self-evaluation/assessment at both Service and Corporate levels. Our annual service self-evaluation (SSE) has been in place since 2016. In completing their SSE, services are encouraged to be honest and objective. Officers across the Council are encouraged to strive to deliver the best services within the resources available and the Council considers that effective self-assessment is not a fixed judgment that is completed once each year, it is an ongoing process.

The SSE asks services to be clear about how they are performing, and this is consistent with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. For example, how they are performing, evidence how they know, and identify what they can do to improve.

The SSEs also:

- Help services to make better decisions, manage risks and provide feedback in respect of the need for and scope of corporate support.
- Demonstrates value for money, potential for service change, spend or efficiencies and identify the impact of new or amended service provision.
- Enables corporate services to identify and prioritise service support needs.
- Acts as the mechanism by which key information is gathered to enable informed statutory reports in respect of the Welsh Language Standards, Equalities & Diversity and Biodiversity.
- Assists services in providing evidence for audits or inspections and deliver the requirements of relevant legislation.

The SSE model is reviewed and refreshed annually to ensure it takes account of feedback from services and remains relevant and fit for purpose. For example, in 2025/26, in line with the Council Transformation agenda and the identified four pillars of Transformation, services were asked to identify how they would 'transform' services in the medium-long term and, in previous years, the SSE has been developed so that services can provide information about the Sustainable Development Principle through the five Ways of Working and other cross cutting themes that inform statutory reports.

Seventeen SSEs were completed by services for 2025/26.

Completed SSEs and Delivery Plans are reviewed and challenge by the Council's Chief Executive during 1-2-1 sessions. This robust and embedded arrangement allows the Chief Executive to hold Officers to account and identify areas where improvement or focus is needed to continually improve. These areas form the basis of service delivery and priority plans for forthcoming years.

These challenge and support meetings continue to be seen as an integral and valuable part of the Performance Management Framework and a positive opportunity to challenge performance, explore service issues and opportunities and gather intelligence on cross cutting issues for the Council.

All completed SSE's and Delivery Plans are available on the Council's Intranet site.

The Delivery Plans are subject to monitoring arrangements that are co-ordinated by our Performance Management Team. Relevant actions from Service Area Delivery Plans are pulled through to form the basis of the 'Priority Plans' that sit underneath the Council's Corporate Plan. These priority plans form the basis of the progress reports that are reported quarterly to Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Service Self Evaluation process continues to identify and consider our more strategic challenges. Key themes identified by the Chief Executive from the 2025 process have informed our assessment of Core Activities and the key strengths and opportunities / areas for improvement for the Council, which are set out in Section 3b.

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL

3B SECTION



ASSESSMENT OF OUR CORE ACTIVITIES

ANNUAL CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT & SELF-ASSESSMENT 2025-2026

ASSESSMENT OF OUR 'CORE ACTIVITIES'

The Well-being of Future Generations Act contains a core set of activities common to the corporate governance of public bodies. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 suggests that we use these as a framework for our self-assessment. However, the Council considers that there are additional activities that also need to be assessed.

The following section of this report is structured around this list of core activities; those that are considered as the core activities as defined by the Well-being of Future Generations Act have been marked with an asterisk for clarity:

- **Strategic Planning and Approach***
- **Financial Planning, Performance and Risk Management***
- **Human Resources/Workforce Planning***
- **Asset Management***
- **ICT and Digital**
- **Procurement and Commissioning***
- **Partnerships**
- **Involvement and Engagement**
- **Welsh Language**
- **Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion**
- **Net Zero**
- **Corporate Safeguarding**
- **Regulators' Feedback**

These areas of work inform and support the strategic direction of the Council, ensuring there is a sound structure of governance, accountability, decision making and legal compliance. It is important to note that all services, whether they are frontline or back-office / support services, form key components of the Council and are all subjected to annual service self-evaluations and delivery planning and strive to improve and make the best and most efficient use of resources.

The combined findings from the Service Self-Evaluation (Section 3A) and assessment of core activities, which form our overall self-assessment, are included in Table 1, with actions to further optimise the impacts of strengths and support opportunities / areas for improvement being incorporated into service delivery plans across the Council, as appropriate.

Table 1: Key findings from the self-assessment and review of core activities

Strengths	Opportunities / Areas for Improvement
Governance and Assurance: Corporate and frontline services demonstrate strong governance, sound internal control, and provide a high degree of organisational assurance.	**Service transformation:** The Council's Transformation Plan is in place with on-going work required to embed the four transformation themes in operation arrangements. This will include digital transformation where there is evidence that we have embraced digital enablers, but we must further deploy digital solutions, automation, system redesign, and artificial intelligence at scale, pace and systematically in order to improve productivity, service accessibility, organisational insight, and the resident experience.
Service resilience and delivery: Services continue to deliver effectively despite operating in complex, high-demand, or changing environments, demonstrating resilience, adaptability, and sustained professional commitment.	**Improved use of data and intelligence:** There is scope to strengthen data integration, predictive analysis, and the use of outcome evidence to support planning, prioritisation, data insights and earlier intervention.
External assurance: Positive inspection, audit, accreditation, or panel assessment outcomes are reported, providing additional confidence in service standards, compliance, and performance.	**Service integration and cross-council alignment:** Recent organisational changes have aligned related functions more closely, making better use of shared expertise which should now deliver more coordinated services across the Council.
Strategic ambition and continuous improvement: There is clear evidence of purposeful service planning, a strong commitment to improvement, and a willingness across services to modernise, innovate, and adapt delivery models where necessary.	**Prevention and early intervention:** Further investment and on-going corporate coordination in this area could reduce future demand, improve outcomes, and enhance sustainability within a number of high-pressure services.
Delivery of organisational change: A number of restructures, service transfers, and leadership changes have been implemented successfully, creating a stronger basis for service alignment, integration, and future development.	**Workforce planning, redesign and talent development:** There is an opportunity to build on the arrangements in place, informed by data insight, to further strengthen succession planning and recruitment approaches, develop internal career pathways, and build specialist capacity in priority functions.
Workforce capability: We have a committed and capable workforce, with many examples of professionalism, flexibility, and investment in staff development, including the effective use of apprenticeship and graduate pathways.	**Asset opportunities and optimising their impact:** There are opportunities to derive greater value from assets, ensuring we have the right assets in the right place in a changing environment, explore more commercial approaches where appropriate and, in doing so, further optimise the positive impacts from capital investment and estate planning.
Corporate contribution and partnership working: A number of services are operating as important corporate enablers, making a significant contribution to wider Council priorities, transformation activity, capital investment, and outcomes for residents and communities.	**Outcome-focused planning and oversight:** Further strengthening of stated outcomes and underpinning measures and the relationship between service evaluation, delivery planning, and measurable impact would improve corporate oversight and provide clearer evidence of the benefits arising from service delivery, service change / transformation and investment and also work with partners.

1. Strategic Planning and Approach

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires the Council and all public bodies to set well-being objectives that maximise their contribution to achieving the seven national well-being goals. In doing so, the Council is expected to take all reasonable steps to meet those Well-being Objectives.

Our Corporate Plan 'Working with our Communities', sets out our four Well-being Objectives:

1. **PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES** – Social Well-being.
2. **WORK & BUSINESS** – Economic Well-being.
3. **NATURE & THE ENVIRONMENT** – Environmental Well-being.
4. **CULTURE, HERITAGE & WELSH LANGUAGE** – Cultural Well-being.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 3 areas for improvement in respect of Strategic Planning and Approach, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 2.

Table 2: Position Statement on Progress: Strategic Planning and Approach

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
We need to continue to be innovative and deliver more targeted and efficient services by considering all options and opportunities, researching what others are doing and deliver on-going service transformation.	Council wide arrangements are in place, led by the Senior Leadership Team, to identify options to deliver more efficient services. The outcome of these well-embedded arrangements supported the Council in setting and delivering a balanced revenue budget for the 2025/26 financial year, this following the Council needing to address one of the largest budget gaps it has ever faced at over £30M and, at the same time, ensured that wherever possible frontline services were protected.
Transformational change needs to be embedded into our processes by building it into the Council's Medium Term Financial Planning arrangements.	The Council's transformation arrangements were reviewed and an updated Transformation Plan put in place that is structured around four pillars: Community Resilience; Prevention; Customer/ Resident Experience; and Efficient, Effective and Optimised Use of Resources, and is integrated with the Council's medium term financial planning arrangements. The four pillars are applicable to all service areas and is supporting a cultural shift in our approach and thought process to lead and facilitate transformation across the Council and complement and enable the delivery of Corporate Plan well-being objectives. This work also supports the Future Generations report, specifically the recommendation that *Public bodies should include prevention as a core strategic objective in corporate strategies and planning.*
We need to continue to use our data meaningfully – using it to identify future trends and inform change.	Progress has been made to strengthen the Council's use of data as a strategic asset, with over 75% of Tier 1 systems having now been onboarded to the corporate data platform, reducing data silos and enabling a single, trusted source of information. This has supported the expansion of standardised dashboards and self-service reporting across service areas to further enhance service performance management arrangements, for example, the programme of data

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
	integration has supported projects such as the Early Intervention and Prevention, bringing together information from multiple systems to support the single view of a child and also Flood Alleviation by combining Customer Relationship Management information and sensor datasets to improve understanding of risk, trends and demand. These initiatives have enabled services to identify emerging patterns, target interventions more effectively and better understand future service pressures.

Collectively, the above progress has contributed to strengthening data driven decision making, informed service planning and transformation, enabled the identification of trends and emerging demand, and supported better outcomes and more efficient use of resources across the Council.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

The Senior Leadership Team reviewed the Council's well-being objectives and determined they remain the same and also directed work to more clearly demonstrate the application of the sustainable development principle, as required by the Well-being of Future Generations Act, and the need for services to more clearly demonstrate the outcomes and impact arising from service delivery. This work included:

- Updating performance management arrangements via a revised Performance Management Framework to further embed the sustainable development principle and five 'Ways of Working' into Service Self Evaluations and Delivery Plans;
- Promoting the requirements of the five Ways of Working by highlighting positive examples in the quarterly and year-end Council Performance Reports; and
- Incorporating more outcome focused information and case studies within performance reporting arrangements, recognising that this requires on-going focus supported by digital solutions that will further strengthen data integration, insight and predictive analysis to support planning, prioritisation and earlier intervention.

This work was also informed by the Future Generations Commissioner's report published in April 2025, The Future Generations report, which contained 22 recommendations relating to work delivered by public bodies in Wales. In response to the report, the Council:

- Delivered training to Senior Officers in collaboration with the Future Generation Commissioner's Office in June 2025 to raise awareness of the recommendations and the Council's response; and
- Presented a formal response to the recommendations to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in October 2025, providing the opportunity for Members to scrutinise the Council's proposed response to the recommendations (relating to public bodies) together with the progress the Council has made to date in these areas. Following scrutiny, the Council's response was provided to the Commissioner.

An update on progress made against relevant recommendations that link to our wellbeing objectives and core activities can be found throughout this document.

Audit Wales Reports

The Auditor General for Wales has the power to examine public bodies, to assess the extent to which a body has acted in accordance with the Sustainable Development Principle when setting Well-being Objectives and taking steps to meet those Well-being Objectives. The Council received the report from Audit Wales in March 2025, the audit findings reported: *The Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives and has considered how they will be resourced over the medium term, but there is scope to improve monitoring of long-term outcomes*.

A report was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on the 29th April 2025. It included a copy of the final report 'Setting of Well-being Objectives' and the Council's Management Response (setting out the actions to be taken by the Council to implement the recommendations). A progress report was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee in April 2026.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Council's Panel Performance Assessment findings relating to strategic planning were:

- A strong, stable, and experienced political and professional officer leadership demonstrating a shared commitment to improving outcomes for the citizens of Rhondda Cynon Taf.
- Effective, respectful and professional Member-Officer relationships with appropriate levels of constructive challenge.
- An inclusive and supportive 'culture', developed over the last decade, that has created the conditions for deeper collaboration with partners, residents and businesses. This has generated opportunities for transformational change – the panel noted in several meetings a ''Team Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT)'' approach.
- The panel identified no critical concerns from external regulators. There is evidence that the Council routinely responds to the findings and recommendations of external and internal auditors and that actions proposed in response to findings is the subject of scrutiny and assurance. The panel considers the Council's scrutiny and assurance arrangements to be strong and effective.

Conclusion

Strategic planning within the Council is led by the Senior Leadership Team, is evidenced based and is an inclusive approach to support and challenge services in setting ambitious plans in line with Corporate Plan well-being objectives. Work has started to embed the four themes from the Transformation Plan into operational arrangements, and this work will need to continue to ensure services are supported and all available resources and tools are deployed. Overall, the principles that run through the areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment 2024/25 continue to be relevant and are being built into the on-going programme of work being taken forward.

2. Financial Planning, Performance and Risk Management

FINANCIAL PLANNING

The Council has well embedded Medium Term Financial Planning (MTFP) arrangements that inform budget setting, with the approach balancing the Council priorities and strategies with affordability, to support service planning and delivery over the medium term. During the year, the MTFP was published and the Council adopted an inclusive approach to enable elected Members to review and scrutinise the position i.e. updates reported to Cabinet, full Council, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and School Budget Forum. The strong financial planning arrangements are supported by effective monitoring and reporting of our performance and clear risk management processes.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

There were no areas for improvement reported in the 2024/25 annual self-assessment.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

Annual Revenue Budget Strategy and 3-year Capital Programme:

Full Council approved the 2025/26 Revenue Budget Strategy and 3-year Capital Programme (2025/26 to 2027/28) on 5th March 2025.

Revenue Budget Strategy 2025/26:

The formulation of the 2025/26 Revenue Budget Strategy was informed by a comprehensive and well-established approach that included taking into account service delivery plans and risks over the medium term; review and challenge of budget requirements across all service areas, led by the Senior Leadership Team; and engagement with residents / stakeholders. The approach enabled the Council to set a balanced budget, totalling £668.179Million, further to addressing a budget gap of £36Million through the delivery of significant efficiency / operational service reconfiguration savings and specific service / expenditure savings. The outcome of the process was a revenue budget that enabled frontline services to be protected as much as possible and targeting and protecting resources for the Council's high priority, customer-focused public services, to support the delivery of sustainable services.

As part of the engagement arrangements and feedback from respondents, the service areas most important to residents included social care and schools, with these areas accounting for approximately 63% of the Council's overall revenue budget.

Capital Programme (2025/26 to 2027/28):

The 3-year Capital Programme totalled £225.315Million and set out the capital investment priorities that will have a long-term impact on the area in terms of regeneration, infra-structure, schools and the Council's built assets to support optimising their use and benefit to local communities. This included significant on-going investment in:

- town centre regeneration to support redevelopment of key sites, buildings and support town centre footfall;
- schools, to deliver on-going improvements in the quality of learning environments and facilities available, and ensuring school buildings are fit for future generations;
- highways, continuing to improve the condition of roads, as demonstrated by reported performance indicators;

- housing, through supporting more affordable housing and adapting peoples' homes to help maintain their independence;
- flood alleviation projects; coal tip safety; and carbon reduction projects that are supporting the Council's decarbonisation ambitions.

In support of The Future Generations Report recommendation 46. *Public bodies must set their annual budgets against the national well-being indicators of Cymru (following similar models in the Republic of Ireland and the City of Strasbourg),* the Council's budget setting arrangements, self-assessment, business and corporate planning continue to take account of the goals and principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (and the national well-being indictors of Cymru) and demonstrates the Council's contribution to national well-being goals.

One pillar of our transformation work focuses on prevention, and the Council is working closely with the Future Generations Commissioner Office as part of assessing Council preventative services and expenditure and utilising agreed definitions. During 2025/26 this work has also included collaborative work with CIPFA to inform shared learning between the Council, CIFPA and Future Generations Commissioner's Office, alongside on-going dialogue with Welsh Government. Our Preventative Spend project work delivers on the Future Generation report recommendation '47. *Public bodies should use the agreed definition of prevention between Welsh Government and my office to map their preventative spend and invest progressively more upstream towards primary prevention'* and has been recognised by CIPFA and Future Generations Commissioner's Office. It was also referenced in the 2025 CIPFA report 'Investing in Prevention' as sector leading in Wales.

The Democratic Services Committee on 20th April 2026 considered the 'Sufficiency of Resources Report – statutory opinion of the statutory Head of Democratic Services' and concluded that

'Through the resources outlined in this report, I am confident that we are providing sufficient support and resources to all of our Elected Members, however we will continually strive to improve the service provided to further assist Members in the important role that they undertake on a daily basis'.

Audit Wales Reports

The external audit of the Council's 2024/25 Statement of Accounts was reported to and approved by full Council on 22nd October 2025, with the outcome being an unqualified (i.e. clean) audit opinion.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's financial planning and management arrangements:

The Council has adopted a continuous approach to the way it undertakes its financial planning, having moved away from a once-a-year exercise. This approach allows the Council to be well prepared in identifying and responding to budget pressures, securing ownership of the financial position amongst all members of the Council and to meaningfully engage with those impacted by proposed policy and service responses at formative stages.

Clear and effective governance systems are in place that are regularly reviewed to ensure their effectiveness. The panel identified that a particular strength of the Council surrounded its approach to financial planning that allows the Council to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its pressures and the identification of a continuous pipeline of potential

budget solutions. This approach facilitates early engagement and consultation for change with Members and Officers and with the wider community.

The panel identified the approach to financial planning taken by the Council is clearly owned by 'team RCT'. There is engagement with all Members at the formative stages of the budget build and collective consideration given to the risk to sustainability being a notable example of involvement, engagement and financial accountability.

The panel concluded that RCT is a Council that has strong corporate financial planning and management functions in place. The process of continually planning and reviewing the budget process cycle rather than undertaking these activities as an once a-year exercise, was considered by the panel to be a particular strength of the Council, valued by staff and Members alike.

Conclusion

The Council's financial planning arrangements are robust and well-embedded across the organisation and effectively support service delivery and transformation within available resources and ensures the Council remains financially resilient and stable during a forward-looking period that is forecasted to present significant financial challenges.

PERFORMANCE

The Council's Corporate Plan 2024-2030 'Working with our Communities' sets the overall direction for the Authority describing the vision, purpose, well-being objectives and defining outcomes, further to stakeholder engagement and scrutiny. In parallel, the Corporate Plan has taken into account the Well-Being of Future Generations Act Sustainable Development Principle, Five Ways of Working and Seven National Well-Being Goals, and has set Four Well-being Objectives.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 3 areas for improvement in respect of Performance, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 3.

Table 3: Position Statement on Progress: Performance

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
A review of the suite of information in place should be undertaken to determine the extent to which impact and outcomes are being demonstrated and, where required, revisions can start to be incorporated into performance reporting arrangements for the 2025/26 financial year. This will take longer than one year to implement fully.	The Council actively engaged with the Welsh Councils Performance Information Community of Practice hosted by the WLGA that seek to improve the use of data with regards to Service User Perspective and Outcome Focussed Measures across Local Authorities. Using the national guidance developed by this group, work commenced in 2025/26 to review our outcomes and performance measures. This review has come at a time when we are in the process of embedding Marmot Principles (aimed at tackling health inequality across the County Borough) into the daily business of all service areas. Our review of outcomes will be an on-going programme of work as part of support arrangements to more clearly demonstrate the impacts from service delivery**.**

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

Work undertaken during the year demonstrates clear alignment between the Council's Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives and:

- Key Council strategic documents including: the Revenue Budget Strategy, 3-year Capital Programme, Medium-Term Financial Plan and Strategic Risk Register, with progress updates reported quarterly as part of in-year Performance Reports;
- The Cwm Taf Morgannwg Well-Being Plan 2023 – 2028, and
- The Council's Quarterly Performance reports are comprehensive and provide information that enables scrutiny.

A programme of training for managers, aspiring managers and Cabinet Members on the Council's Performance Management Framework (PMF) was completed, with positive feedback from attendees that has helped to improve their understanding of the framework in which they work. In addition, through embedding information on the WFG Act and how it is integrated into the Council's Performance arrangements, we have also responded to the Future Generations Report recommendation '*4. Public bodies must ensure that staff responsible for corporate areas of change understand the WFG Act in a way that improves the quality and consistency of implementation through mandatory training and*

capacity development'. The PMF training programme will continue to be delivered and developed in 2026/27, including the roll out of a 'Bitesize' training module accessible to all staff.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to Performance.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's performance management arrangements:

> ***....the Council has a mature planning and performance framework that has been embedded across the Council.... This framework is viewed as a positive driver of change by the Service Heads.***
>
> ***....the planning and performance framework enables the Council to know itself well and to have a clear understanding of its future opportunities and challenges. The planning and performance framework has recently been further developed to respond to recommendations made by Audit Wales and the Panel saw evidence of the Council improving its understanding of the 'impact and expected outcome' of the work it does.... Consequently, the Council can demonstrate a 'Golden Thread' in terms of the approach to service planning and the medium-term financial plan'.***

The panel identified that the strong performance management framework the Council has in place provides a firm platform to clearly identify priorities and to deliver these through the Council's governance systems.

Conclusion

The Council's Performance Management Framework supports a strong performance management culture throughout the organisation and provides clear arrangements to enable effective service self-evaluation, service delivery and monitoring. As part of the on-going focus to more clearly demonstrate the outcomes and impact arising from activities:

- a review of the Council's stated outcomes in consultation with the Senior Leadership Team will be progressed to ensure they continue to represent a clear statement of intent, underpinned by a suite of meaningful measures, and will also take into account the Marmot Principles; and
- improving the use of data and intelligence through strengthening data integration and predictive analysis and using outcome evidence to support planning, prioritisation and earlier intervention.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The Council has a clear approach to managing risk, as set out within its Risk Management Strategy. The Governance and Audit Committee's Terms of Reference sets out its purpose in respect of risk as providing ' *...independent assurance to the Members of Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment'*. This is also underpinned by specific responsibilities.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 1 area for improvement in respect of Risk Management, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 4.

Table 4: Position Statement on Progress: Risk Management

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
Medium to longer term actions to manage our strategic risks should be developed and included within the Strategic Risk Register for 2025/26, thereby aligning with service delivery plans and the Council's Corporate Plan 2024 – 2030.	Longer term mitigating actions were included within the Strategic Risk Register, with some longer-term actions covering the life of the Corporate Plan (to 2030).

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

The Council's strategic risks were reviewed, challenged and agreed by the Senior Leadership Team at the start of the year and thereafter monitored on an on-going basis and updates included with the Council's quarterly Performance Reports.

The information contained within the Risk Management Strategy and Toolkit was used to develop a training resource for Officers across the Council, the detail of which was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on 29th April 2025, with clear alignment to the Performance Management Framework.

Other key activities in respect of the Council's risk management arrangements were:

- The Risk Management Strategy was reviewed and reported to the Governance and Audit Committee on 29th April 2025, with updates being of a housekeeping nature.
- Strategic Risk Register updates were reported to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee during the year and the Committee requested more detailed updates to provide assurance on the robustness of the arrangements in place in respect of:
  - Strategic Risk 11 – Regenerating our communities on 4th November 2025
  - Strategic Risk 24 – A carbon neutral Council on 16th December 2025
  - Strategic Risk 30 – Supporting our Young People with Additional Learning Needs on 3rd February 2026

More specifically, Recommendation 14 of the Future Generations Report states *'Climate resilience and adaptation must become a core public service priority. By the end of 2027, Public Services Boards should*

assess climate risks for their communities, updating their findings every five years as part of their well-being assessments. Public bodies must integrate these findings into their corporate and strategic planning'. Within the Council. Climate risk is monitored via the strategic risk register through Strategic Risk 26 – 'Managing the physical impact of climate change on our communities' and the Council engages with partners via the 3 working groups monitoring progress against the workstreams within the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Climate Risk Assessment.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to Risk Management.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's risk management arrangements:

> ***The Council has systems in place that identify and manage risk through its strategic risk register. Risk is reported quarterly to Cabinet and risk is considered across the Council and not simply in service areas.***

Conclusion

The Council's risk management arrangements are integrated within the Performance Management Framework and enable changes in risks and new emerging risks to be identified early, kept under on-going review and reported, and, in doing so, are supporting the delivery of Corporate Plan well-being objectives and other local service priorities.

3. Human Resources/Workforce Planning

Continued progress in the delivery of the Human Resources Strategy 2023-28 (supported by the Workforce Plan 2023-28), which has resulted in positive impacts on staff satisfaction and staff turnover rates across the Council, with recruitment, retention and succession planning across the Council remaining key areas for prioritised focus.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 2 areas for improvement in respect of Human Resources/ Workforce Planning, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 5.

Table 5: Position Statement on Progress: Human Resources / Workforce Planning

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
We need to continue to focus HR expertise on those Service Areas that have identified recruitment and retention as a key risk.	Programmes of work are in place to support workforce / succession planning and retention via initiatives such as Graduate and Apprenticeship Schemes, sponsored social-work qualifications, leadership development and coaching and innovative approaches such as enhanced flexibility, and are having positive impacts locally across services. In parallel, to address service specific needs, some services have their own workforce strategies (e.g. Adult Services and Children's Services). In overall terms, the combined impact of these initiatives is supporting a positive and intended direction of travel via a reducing Council wide turnover rate, for example, 11.51% in 2023/24 reducing to 9.04% in 2025/26.
We need to continue to develop our succession planning arrangements to support medium to long term service planning and resilience.	
We need to build on the progress in respect of implementing the iTrent system (the integrated Payroll and HR System). This will allow for a wider suite of data to be accessed and reviewed to measure compliance by our managers.	A suite of workforce information is available to managers in real time, to support day-to-day service delivery, significant progress in the roll-out of Employee Self Service to employees and new training and performance dashboards are improving oversight, compliance monitoring and evidence-based workforce planning. Alongside, an update was reported to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11th March 2026 (Workforce Data Follow Up) and additional information has been included within the Council's Performance Report in respect of health and safety to further enhance accountability and scrutiny of the Council's workforce data.

The above areas will continue to be afforded prioritised focus moving forward, supported by digital transformation and also taking into account the new requirements of Employment Rights Act 2025, as part of the on-going development of the Council's workforce management and planning arrangements.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

An annual review of the Human Resources Strategy, reporting on progress during 2024/25, was presented to Cabinet at its meeting held on 24th November 2025. It was agreed to add two new objectives to the Strategy reflect the current context, covering change management and digital transformation. An update report on progress during 2025/26 will be presented to the Council's Senior Leadership and then Cabinet during the autumn of 2026. Initial indications show positive progress:

- The Council remained a **Real Living Wage Employer** and continued recruitment and retention initiatives.
- Staff survey participation increased to **20.8%**, its highest reported level, with improved results for trust, training, development opportunities and management support.
- Supporting service transformation and service restructuring across the organisation to support improved integration, resilience and efficiency, for example, the Council's senior and associated management structure that was implemented from 1st November 2025; Adult and Children's Services restructures and re-modelling; and School Improvement Service.
- On-going focus on supporting and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, as set out in the Annual Equality Report.

Audit Wales Reports

Audit Wales Report undertook a review of recruitment and retention as part of its agreed work programme and published its report, 'Recruitment and retention challenges – the right people at the right time?', in April 2026 that was reported to the Governance & Audit Committee in June 2026. Audit Wales found that:

The Council has a broad understanding of hard to fill posts and is taking a range of actions to tackle recruitment and retention challenges with some successes. This includes its graduate and apprenticeship programme.

Whilst the Council evaluates some of its activities it does not always evaluate the value for money of its approach to recruitment and retention. We also found there is scope to improve its use of data to help target recruitment and retention activity.

The Council has accepted the recommendations and set out what action it is taking as part of the update to Governance and Audit Committee in June 2026.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's human resources / workforce planning arrangements:

The Council has a good track record of 'growing its own' and is proud of its achievements in employing local people within its apprentice programme and its graduate trainee programme. The HR team is seen as being responsive to the needs identified by services, offering a blend of on-line and face to face training and development activities. The Council has prioritised recruitment and retention of its workforce and is seeing some positive progress in filling hard-to-recruit-to jobs. The cultural shift the Council wants to make will place further demands on the HR team. The panel concluded that early attention to the workforce development strategy is needed to support the cultural shift that is planned and will be an important consideration to support the transformation programme and to enable the HR function to adapt as may be necessary.

Conclusion

The Council's human resources arrangements are positively supporting service delivery and transformation across the Council and ensuring service areas have compliant and effective arrangements in place. There will be on-going focus on strengthening succession planning, modernising practices supported by digital solutions and data insights, continuing to build specialist capacity in priority functions and supporting service transformation.

4. Asset Management

The property estate of the Council comprises a wide variety of land and built assets and includes schools, libraries, depots and waste disposal sites, cemeteries and crematorium site, allotments, offices, community centres, homes for the elderly, children's homes, theatres, and investment property, with sound arrangements in place to keep the estate under review and ensure the Council has the right assets in the right place.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 2 areas for improvement in respect of Asset Management, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 6.

Table 6: Position Statement on Progress: Asset Management

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
We need to ensure that we have the right assets in the right place and not be limited by where our assets currently are. The information we hold and refresh on the needs and demands of our residents, now and in the future, will inform this process.	A comprehensive suite of information is in place to manage, maintain and plan asset requirements and this information is informing on-going engagement with services to ensure assets meet current and future service delivery needs, with any changes considered holistically and with a long-term perspective in mind. This is evidenced through prioritising investment and maximising occupancy of core office accommodation sites across the County Borough, significant investment in new / modernised assets across the school and adult social care estate, ensuring Council assets are well maintained and are in accessible locations for our residents. It is recognised that this will be an on-going programme of work.
For all our built assets, we need to ensure they are utilised fully and are run efficiently, supported by our energy consumption monitoring arrangements.	

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

The Council has a Corporate Asset Management Plan in place with overall positive progress demonstrated against key priorities, and a position statement reported to Cabinet on 22nd October 2025.

The Council's assets have been kept under review, taking account of service requirements, to ensure the Council has the right people in the right place to efficiently and effectively support service delivery.

The Council continued to invest in improving the energy efficiency of its buildings, via the Cabon Reduction Programme, with 43 projects delivered and ensuring a sustained income source from solar and electric vehicle charging points. This work fed into the Council's overall decarbonisation strategy, where for the 2024/25 financial type 1 and 2 emissions (i.e. those directly influenced by the Council) reduced by over 6% compared to 2023/24.

Linked to the above, there has been continued focus on installing electric vehicle charging bays, with a total of 164 installed in the year, 121 bays being made available to fleet, 58 bays available to the public and 117 being made available to staff and visitors.

The Council also continued to engage with communities to facilitate Community Asset Transfers where viable business cases were in place and, moving forward, further opportunities will be explored for co-location of services, including with partners.

There has been sustained capital investment in the Council's infrastructure and assets, totalling £138M in 2025/26, as part of asset management arrangements, that has included the successful delivery of significant capital projects across schools, care homes for the elderly, energy projects and maintenance of land reclamation sites.

Robust maintenance and testing arrangements are in place that ensure compliance with the Council's statutory responsibilities in respect of asbestos, legionella and health and safety ensuring the Council assets are fit for purpose.

Audit Wales Reports

There was no specific review work undertaken by our regulators in respect of the Council's asset management arrangements; however, Audit Wales did undertake a national study: 'The Building Blocks? Capital Planning in Councils in Wales' and reported 3 recommendations for local authorities to consider and support the identification of area for improvement. Following review, the Council considered that the recommendations are, for the most part, already being applied and will use the report to support on-going improvement to its arrangements. The Audit Wales report and Council's response were reported to the Governance and Audit Committee 30th March 2026.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

There were no specific findings in respect of asset management as part of the Panel Performance Assessment.

Conclusion

The Council has effective asset management arrangements in place that plan and deliver a sustained and significant programme of capital investment and maintenance and decarbonisation programmes, this supporting a fit for purpose portfolio of assets. Alongside a changing operating environment and service user needs, the asset management arrangements will need to ensure the Council continues to have the right assets in the right place and that positive impacts are optimised, including from commercial opportunities where appropriate and in line with the Council's Capital Strategy.

5. ICT and Digital Service

The Council has continued its positive track record of implementing digital change, recognising the need to do more in this fast-paced environment. The Council continues to make strong progress in supporting organisational and service changes through the delivery of its Digital Strategy 2022 – 2026, with the approach supporting the delivery of the Council's priorities and is consistent with the requirements as set out within the National Digital Strategy for Wales. Our Strategy comprises four work streams: Digital Solutions and Service Design; Data Insight and Intelligence; Digital Skills, Learning and Inclusion; and Digital Infrastructure.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement - Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 2 areas for improvement in respect of ICT and Digital Services, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 7.

Table 7: Position Statement on Progress: ICT and Digital Service

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
We need to continue to explore technology such as Artificial Intelligence to support on-going effective and efficient service delivery that meets the needs of our customers / service users. We also need to continue to explore what others are doing and where relevant, learn from them.	**This area for improvement has been progressed via the Digital Solutions and Service Design workstream and supports the Council's Transformation Plan of Customer / Resident Experience.** Key areas of progress include: ▪ Front door reviews have been completed on Adult, Children's, Community and Waste Services points of access and will be used to inform opportunities to re-model services to provide better customer service for our residents and service users and more efficient service delivery. ▪ A Customer Experience Platform has been procured that is scalable to meet the current and future needs of the Council and our customers. This solution will provide a consolidated platform across many Council services, better enabling a single view of the customer with enhanced self-service features to offer an efficient and transparent way for people to request and monitor progress of their service. The existing Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solutions will initially be onboarded, whilst in parallel wider Council systems will be reviewed for future consolidation into this platform, where it is beneficial to do so, enhancing our ability to enable automated end to end digital processes, further exploit Artificial Intelligence (AI) and reduce the complexity of our technology estate. ▪ Several wider digital programmes were progressed, notably with Environmental Services, Human Resource Self Service and Social Care. These programmes have included identifying high value opportunities, redesigning processes, and delivering digital solutions that improve both operational efficiency and the experience ▪ We have collaborated with national bodies, peer authorities, and suppliers, contributing to a range of activities that includes key delivery areas such as the national AI & Robotic Process Automation Group and DiSC Cymru (Digital in Social Care), which is a Wales wide partnership programme focused on digital transformation in social care. Its purpose is to improve how local authorities and

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
	partners use digital tools, data, and technology in a coordinated, sustainable way across Wales. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was extended across the Council to further explore use cases and how the technology could best be used to benefit the Council. Work has initially been focused within Social Care, seeking to maximise learning and the benefits from Microsoft CoPilot and an AI powered tool called Sgript, which transforms audio, notes and other content into digital forms for onward workflow. The work has demonstrated benefits, including reduced administrative burden, improved productivity and improved staff well-being.
We need to review our website and ensure that information that is regularly requested is easy to find and accurate, this can help to improve the customer experience and reduce the number of calls received by our call centre allowing them to focus on the most important calls. This will also allow our residents to receive the best possible service by 'going online.'	**This area for improvement has been progressed via the Digital Solutions and Service Design with key areas of progress below:** ▪ We have reviewed our content across key areas of the website focusing upon updating information, improving accuracy and making content more concise and easier to understand based on resident research and user feedback. ▪ Our website Policy has also been updated to reflect the changing digital landscape, including the appropriate use of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). In addition, the website platform has been enhanced to benefit from the latest technology, enabling insights into content quality, search engine optimisation, improving accessibility and user experience. This work is helping to inform the development of a Council-wide contact strategy by ensuring residents can quickly find the information and services they need online, seeking to reduce avoidable contact and allowing services to focus on more complex enquiries. It also aligns with our wider work to reshape the council's front doors (the primary points of contact between residents and Council services) creating a more joined-up, customer-focused approach that makes it easier for people to access the right service at the right time. Actions are in place within our delivery plan to achieve this.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

Other key work delivered through the Strategy workstreams included:

Data Insight and Intelligence

Data is recognised as a strategic asset that can be harnessed to drive both operational and strategic change. Work continues to build holistic views of information.

- The Corporate Data & Insights team has championed a collaborative approach across the organisation to assist reducing data silos with an on-going programme of work in place to onboard to a corporate data platform, enabling a more integrated approach to data management and its use to develop insight and better inform decision making. This approach is leading to reduced reliance on third party reporting tools and enabled the development of data dashboards, ensuring that many service areas benefit from more timely, reliable and standardised insight.

- The work to extend the creation of data insights and intelligence has provided strong foundations to allow the development of predictive analytics, which is now helping service areas anticipate pressures and respond earlier, for example:
  - Waste Services to assist forecasting recycling bag demand, improve stock control and operational efficiency.
  - Flood Risk Management to link causes and events to identify early flood-risk indicators.
  - Children Looked After and Homelessness - helping predict future demand, enabling earlier intervention and more effective resource planning.
- We have strengthened our data, research, and digital capabilities through the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC). Building internal capacity for research and analysis and fostering a culture of data-informed decision-making to improve future health outcomes for our residents.
- We have continued to uphold our data protection legislative obligations by maintaining robust governance structures and ensuring consistent use of key documentation including data sharing agreements, privacy notices and data protection impact assessments (DPIAs).

Digital Skills, Learning and Inclusion:

Work has been undertaken to enable opportunities for staff, elected members and people within our community to improve skills, develop digital competency, build confidence and access to assisted digital support.

Key areas progressed include:

- Digital solutions adoption support has been provided as part of targeted improvement for staff and elected members as part of implementing new technology, processes and projects. For example, AI.
- Bitesize sessions have been used to good effect to raise staff and elected member awareness and skills on a range of topics.
- Protection and compliance mandatory training for Cyber Security and Data Protection has raised awareness and strengthened knowledge to reduce risk for both the Council and Schools.
- Schools' Digital Strategy and HWB implementation have been supported as a key enabler to the Digital Curriculum.
- Community-based activities have been delivered to increase the confidence and awareness of our residents. Examples include Media Literacy awareness with Ofcom and Digital Fridays at our Libraries to improve people's confidence in the use of technology.
- Ensuring accessibility standards are monitored and our website adapted accordingly and providing a sensory line for those hard of hearing.

Digital Infrastructure

The Service has built robust technical foundations that are essential for enabling and sustaining digital transformation across the organisation. We have continued to invest in our core infrastructure, modernising our application estate, optimising existing systems and reducing complexity to create a stable secure technology environment that effectively supports the Council. Key work to strengthen our infrastructure took place during 2025/26, examples include: Implementation of new data storage solution; Implementation of enhanced Anti-Virus solution; Improvements to the Council's Disaster Recovery facility; Implementation a new Lifeline Alarm Receiving Centre; Migration of all Council Microsoft devices to Windows 11; Refreshed network infrastructure at required sites; Supporting Schools to migrate to a new Management Information System (MIS) solution; and Supporting Social Care in delivering the new Connecting Care solution

Cyber Security & Resilience remains fundamental. Work took place to safeguard, prevent and ensure that the Council is prepared to effectively respond to attacks. PSN reaccreditation was once again achieved, and we have further integrated our ways of working with the Cymru Security Operations Centre (SOC) to provide improved threat detection and response. Cyber assurance features as a strategic risk monitored in the Council's Strategic Risk Register as part of the Council's quarterly performance report to Cabinet, referred in Risk 20 as part of governance arrangements Cyber Assurance is monitored, challenged and scrutinised through the Cyber Assurance Board.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's ICT and digital arrangements:

> ***The Council is undertaking infrastructure upgrades including to its Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) and website to improve customer experiences. A team with capability to review and redesign business processes also works alongside the technical digital functions. This growing capability will directly support the Council's transformation ambitions to improve the user experience and reduce costs. Work to develop a data sciences capability is also underway, albeit less mature than the technology function.***

Conclusion

The Council has continued its positive track record of implementing digital change and ensuring the resilience and security of the Council's IT infrastructure is fit for purpose. The ICT and Digital Service will continue to be central in enabling services across the Council to use digital solutions to transform and re-design provision and optimise data integration and data insight opportunities to further improve service planning, productivity and resilience and also accessibility of services for service users and resident experience.

6. Procurement and Commissioning

We continue to strengthen our approach to Sustainable Procurement, through our Commissioning, Socially Responsible Procurement and Contract Management Strategy 2024/30. Our progress is generally positive, and we continue to strive to maximise the value, including social value, in our contracts. During 2025/26 we planned for and implemented new requirements placed upon the Council in respect of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement (Wales) Act 2023, that came into effect during March 2026. Additionally, the service managed the transition to new processes as determined by the Procurement Act 2023. In 2025/26, £248M (67%) of the Council's spend was with suppliers across Wales, of this total £207M was spent through suppliers registered in the City Deal Region, £92M of which was with suppliers registered in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 1 area for improvement in respect of Procurement and Commissioning, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 8.

Table 8: Position Statement on Progress: Procurement and Commissioning

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
We need to rollout our carbon toolkit across key contracts with a view to moving from Tier 1 to Tier 2 reporting to Welsh Government.	Work to deliver progress against this area for improvement was slower than anticipated during 2025/26 and this was due to the additional resource required to implement the two Acts noted above. An update was reported to the Climate Change Cabinet Sub-Committee on 3rd July 2025. The Council has worked with neighbouring authorities and has identified a suitable and consistent mechanism that aims to move away from the Tier 1 reporting and will be an area of focus during 2026/27 and beyond.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

Legal compliance and delivering social value

The Procurement Service supports the Council to deliver contracts that are legally compliant and wherever possible added value for our communities.

The Procurement Service supported Service Areas of the Council to award over 130 contracts, ranging in value, complexity and nature.

The legal landscape within which the Council operates has changed significantly over the past 2 years and the Council's Procurement Service has facilitated the transition to ensure compliance. The Acts, The Procurement Act 2023 which came into effect in February 2025 and the procurement duties of the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act (Wales) 2023 (SPPP) came into force in March 2026, placed additional administrative duties on the Council to ensure compliance, the aim being to increase transparency across the Public Sector of the UK. The Council took steps to ensure implement the requirements, including:

- **The Council's Contract Procedure Rules were reviewed and updated.**
- **Changes to standard tender documentation.**
- **Chief Officer workshops held to raise awareness.**

The Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act (Wales) Act also placed a legal requirement on the Council to take every possible step to improve the economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being of the area through its procurement activities. The Council was very well placed to deliver this legal responsibility as these arrangements were already in place through our social value processes:

Examples of the Social Value secured during 2025/26 include:

A Prosperous Wales

- **46 jobs created**, and **50 jobs retained** by the employer following contract award, or extension.
- **44 apprentice opportunities**.
- Our Suppliers/Contractors have also provided **1,174 hours of support** targeted at curriculum and educational activities for local schools and colleges.
- An additional **7,821 hours** and **£52,480 has been committed** to provide more opportunities for local businesses and innovative ideas e.g. provision of expert business advice.
- **5,432 weeks** have been delivered in upskilling existing staff on vocational qualifications.
- During the delivery of the contracts being monitored, **£7,496,672 has been spent with the local supply chain**, further improving the local economy and supporting local businesses.

A Globally Responsible Wales

- **£13,920** and **995 hours** have been committed to supporting supplier and community groups in promoting climate change and carbon reduction initiatives. **250 hours** have been returned to date.

A Resilient Wales

- Our Contractors have committed to **1,232 hours** and **£57,588** towards safeguarding the environment and supporting local environmental and biodiversity conservations. During 2025/26 **£19,575** and **94 hours** have been delivered to date. Examples of these initiatives include litter picks organised through Keep Wales Tidy and donations to the Alun Maddox Visitor Educational centre at Bryn Pica.

A Healthier Wales

- **£102,230** and **3,271 hours** have been committed to creating a healthier community and improving staff well-being. Examples of this include contributions to supporting Llamau to tackle homelessness in RCT, as well as contributions valued at **£2,347** to deliver mental health campaigns to support staff associated with the contracts.

A More Equal Wales

- **63 FTE opportunities** have been created for residents who have been unemployed for a minimum of 6 months.
- Our contractors have also provided **225 hours of support to unemployed people** and care leavers through career mentoring, mock interviews and CV advice.
- During the delivery of the contracts being monitored, the suppliers / contractors have committed to **1,214 weeks of work experience**, supporting the Council's Employment, Education and Training Team with their Care2Work and Summer Employability Scheme, with **109 weeks** delivered to date.
- **£6,960** has been committed towards 'Innovation for a more equal Wales'.

A Wales of Cohesive Communities

- A total of **4,224 hours** and **£193,510 monetary donation** has been committed to supporting community project groups and Council administered community funds, providing support to disadvantaged, older, disabled ad vulnerable people and their families.
- Furthermore, contractor donations totalling **£32,653** have supported Trussell Trust Foodbanks; sponsorship of local sports teams; regeneration of community spaces; Design and printing of leaflets/booklets for community groups to promote activities; Donations of activities and days out for

vulnerable children e.g. Zipworld, cinema tickets, etc; Fruit and veggie sessions to promote healthy eating and introduce cooking together in primary schools; Donation of Easter eggs to our children looked after.

A Wales of Vibrant Shared Culture and Thriving Welsh Language

- To promote the Welsh Language and support Welsh cultural events, **3,682 hours** have been committed by contractors, with **459 hours** being delivered to date. A monetary donation of **£8,500** has also been invested for people to learn and use Welsh within the contractor's workforce and to get involved in Welsh cultural events, arts, sports and heritage activities.

Carbon Footprint Associated with Procured Goods and Services

The carbon footprint associated with procured goods, works and services accounts for approximately 75% of the Council's total carbon footprint (latest footprint based on the financial year 2024/25).

The calculation of a supplier's carbon footprint is completed using 'financial proxies'. This means that for every pound spent a nominal amount of carbon is allocated. This is known as the Tier 1 reporting method. It is accepted that Tier 1 reporting only produces indicative estimates on emissions and that the actual emissions relating to the product or service might be different. As a result, this method may not reflect any efforts made to reduce emissions through efficiencies in the supply chain, e.g. through choosing a more energy efficient supplier or working with suppliers to reduce material use.

Audit Wales Reports

Audit Wales undertook a review of the Council's Commissioning arrangements and concluded overall that the Council has a generally clear and appropriate approach to commissioning, but there are weaknesses in its arrangements to ensure that value for money is consistently being achieved.

The report set out 3 recommendations, these being agreed by management and focussed on updating standard documentation in place within the Council to demonstrate and evidence that specific actions are undertaken, for example, option appraisals, review of value for money.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's procurement and commissioning arrangements:

> ***The Council has invested in its procurement function, operating a 'grow your own' approach to securing a sufficient workforce to deliver the function. Improvement work over recent years has enabled the Council to embed social value requirements into its supply chain. Evidence of how well suppliers are delivering on these commitments are included in contract monitoring and there is work to understand the wider community impact of this approach in train. The Council has also incorporated net zero commitment into its approach, requiring carbon reduction plans to be submitted by suppliers. The Council reports that it plans to further develop its approach by extending digitisation across the function and making full use of data sciences approaches.***

Conclusion

The Council's procurement and commissioning arrangements are well embedded and have a positive track record of supporting legally compliant contracts that deliver social value for our communities, with work continuing to reduce the carbon footprint for procured goods and services.

7. Partnerships

The Council continues to build on its positive track record of partnership working and collaborating with others. We work with regional partners and community groups to meet a range of need and demand. There are many examples of collaborative arrangements in place (RCT Together).

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

There were no areas for improvement reported in the 2024/25 annual self-assessment.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

The duty to collaborate is a one of the five Ways of Working that public bodies need to implement to demonstrate they are meeting the Sustainable Development requirements set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. However, we work in partnership because it is the right thing to do to improve outcomes for people and communities and maximise our collective resources. We are keen to ensure that any work with Partners delivers value, outcomes and positive impacts for our residents and communities.

Our Corporate Plan 'Working with our Communities' is clear that 'with budgets under pressure and demands on our services increasing we need to develop and manage realistic expectations through a strengthened partnership approach'. The Plan embeds partnership approaches to delivery throughout the four Well-being Objectives and the underpinning Priorities. The Plan also sets out our clear commitment to partners: '....we will be committed and active partners in our work with others, seeking and challenging where we can add more and better outcomes for our residents, communities and businesses by working together'.

Our Rules of Procedure within the Constitution sets out the definition of formal partnerships and the associated responsibilities and controls in place.

Strategic Partnerships

The changes to the strategic partnership landscape across our region continues to progress. Some of our major partnership changes include:

- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Service Board (PSB) - the PSB is continuing to progress the delivery of its CTM Well-being Plan with the Scrutiny arrangements supported by this Council. Key work in 2025/26 included:
  - The appointment of the Council's Chief Executive as the new Chair of the PSB which included a review of Leadership, Governance & Accountability. This focused on the delivery of the Well-Being Objectives which concluded in July 2025 with a report presented on the 17th July 2025.
  - The review proposed several improvements to governance and accountability arrangements including more formal reporting arrangements, regular review and continued integration across the wider partnership arrangements in the region.
  - In October 2025 the PSB confirming commitment to the Climate Change Risk Assessment, Healthy Travel and Food Resilience workstreams.
  - The PSB agreeing to support the work required in respect of tackling inequalities in health through a system wide approach to community well-being, building on emerging work across the region.

- An update report was presented the CTMPSB on the 8th January 2026. Scrutiny of a 'one year on follow- up review will be presented in October 2026 to the CTM PSB Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (CTMPSB JOSC).
- This work is being supported by the Council's Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) Team.

- CTM Regional Partnership Board (RPB) – we are strengthening our arrangements in our work as part of the RPB.
  - The 2023-28 Cwm Taf Morgannwg Regional Area Plan, informed by the Population Needs Assessment continues to be implemented by the RPB Annual Report 2024 - 2025 - CTM.
  - The Council has been working with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTMUHB), Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and Bridgend County Borough Council to strengthen joint working arrangements so that our residents that are living with frailty can access better, more integrated health and social care services.
  - Progressing the integration of Health and Social Care has been slower than anticipated but a Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) was presented to and agreed by Cabinet in July 2025.
    - The RPA marks a significant milestone in our journey toward integrated health and social care. It reflects the maturity of our partnership with CTMUHB and neighbouring authorities, and our shared ambition to deliver seamless, person centred support for older people and those living with frailty.
    - Cabinet's endorsement of the RPA enables us to move forward with confidence, ensuring that our governance, commissioning, and delivery arrangements are fit for the future.
  - Scrutiny of the work of the RPB is now undertaken by the CTM PSB Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee (CTMPSB JOSC).
    - Regular updates on the progress of the Integrated Community Care System (ICCS) Model and the Regional Partnership Agreement are presented to the JOSC. The JOSC aims to provide assurance that the work of the RPB continues to provide value for money and in the interests of good governance.

- Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership (CSP) – the single regional Cwm Taf Morgannwg Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has been in operation since 2024/25. The aim is to strengthen collaborative approaches to community safety across the region.
  - The work undertaken to date demonstrates a clear commitment from partners to align strategic priorities, improve coordination and deliver meaningful interventions focused on preventing violent crime, promoting cohesive communities and creating safe spaces.
  - A progress report was presented to Community Services – Crime and Disorder Committee in February 2026. A further report was presented to the Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB JOSC in April 2026, with a particular focus on activities 'Promoting Cohesive Communities' including a Community Cohesion Collaboration Agreement developed jointly by South Wales Police and the seven Local Authorities within South Wales.

- CTM Safeguarding Board - In March 2023, the Board published a three-year Strategic Plan and each subsequent year during March it publishes its Annual Plan 2025-26 CTMSB Strategic Plan (Year 3) setting out its key priorities for the coming year. These priorities stem from the lessons that have been learnt over previous years and an analysis of the prevalent and emerging safeguarding issues affecting the CTM region. During 2025/26, this included a continued focus on developing the strategical approach to exploitation both in relation to children and adults at risk, with the Board launching its regional Exploitation Strategy in September 2025 Cwm Taf Morgannwg Exploitation Strategy and Toolkit | Safeguarding, Cwm Taf Morgannwg. The regional Exploitation Strategy has supported

agencies and those in local communities to better identify all forms of exploitation and support an increased understanding of how to report any concerns.

- South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) – following transition from the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal to the South-East Wales Corporate Joint Committee (CJC), scrutiny arrangements for the CJC were established and supported through a service level agreement with the Council.

Health Determinants Research Collaboration

The RCT Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) is an initiative supported by the National Institute for Health Research to help us to become more 'research-active'. The RCT HDRC is one of 30 HDRCs in the UK and the first fully funded HDRC in Wales.

The work of the HDRC is led by the Council and we work in partnership with Cardiff University, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, Interlink RCT and third sector partners, and Public Health Wales and aims to create a culture where decisions about health and Well-being are evidence-based, and our communities are engaged in the gathering of evidence that underpins decisions made relating to reducing health inequalities.

The work of the HDRC Team focused on three themes during 2025/26:

Theme 1: Investing in Preventative Approaches

- Mapping Preventative Spend
- Defining Community Resilience
- Improving the Recruitment of Foster Carers
- Early Intervention and Prevention and Early Help
- Measuring the Impact of the Children's Services Model of Practice
- Adolescent Girls' Mental Health and Wellbeing
- School Connectedness
- Serious Violence and Schools

Theme 2 - Increasing Wellbeing

- Child Poverty
- Active Travel to Improve Health
- Developing a 4-year Housing Support Strategy
- Evaluation of the Council's Wellbeing Strategy
- Developing a 5-year Youth Support Services Strategy
- Developing a Parenting Research Network
- Evaluating the Health Impacts of Climate Adaptation Pathways

Theme 3 - Improving Access to Support

- Better Access to Services
- Understanding Non-engagement in Leisure and Cultural Services
- Using Lived Experience in EDI Practice in Leisure
- Evaluating the Community Care System for Older People
- Evaluating the CTM Housing Outreach Service
- Unpaid Male Carers

There has been significant UK wide interest in the work of RCT HDRC with case studies published by the NIHR. RCT HDRC has delivered keynote sessions at conferences across the UK, hosted two webinars and recorded a podcast for Leeds University. Our Preventative Spend project work has been recognised

by CIPFA, The Future Generations Commissioner's Office and the Scottish Government and was referenced in the 2025 CIPFA report 'Investing in Prevention' as sector leading in Wales. This work supports the Future Generations report, specifically the recommendation that 'Public bodies should use the agreed definition of prevention between Welsh Government and my office to map their preventative spend and invest progressively more upstream towards primary prevention'.

Directly aligned to the aims of the HDRC Team is the Marmot Principles. The Welsh Government have identified five local authorities across Wales, including Rhondda Cynon Taf, to participate in the Marmot Nation/Health Equity Wales initiative. Rhondda Cynon Taf has been identified as one of the two 'early adopter' local authorities, that will benefit from two years of funding and professional expertise from national partners. RCT HDRC has been invited to share learning and expertise at the national Marmot Learning event led by Public Health Wales. Work to further embed the Marmot Principles into the 'day to day' work of all Council departments will take place during 2026/27 and beyond and this will be reported back into the relevant regional partnerships. This work supports the Future Generations report, specifically the recommendation that 'Public Bodies and Public Services Boards should work together, along with the private and voluntary sectors, to implement the social model of health, placemaking and/or the Marmot principles to improve action on the wider determinants and reduce inequalities in their areas'.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to partnerships.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's partnership arrangements:

The panel heard that the Council offers strategic leadership and direction, but it has also invested the time to develop those important trusting strategic relationships with its partners and wider stakeholders. This engenders a sense of inclusive collaboration with a focus on improving RCT for the people who live, work and visit there. A partner commented 'Paul (CEO) has taken a clear leadership role at the PSB and given it shape, he makes himself available, takes a co-production approach and seeks feedback'. External partners and other stakeholders spoke positively of the Council's willingness to work inclusively, with examples given of the Council sharing its resources and expertise in the partnership space to further the wider public good. This is much valued by partners.

Conclusion

The Council has a positive track record of working in partnership to support the delivery of outcomes to benefit communities across the County Borough. This work will continue and also take into account the Marmot principles as part of the on-going development of arrangements in place.

8. Involvement and Engagement

We have continued to widen and strengthen our engagement, involvement and feedback channels, to find out what matters to people and also to make better use of the information we receive from the various feedback channels to shape and inform service delivery, plans and policy.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

The 2024/25 self-assessment identified 1 area for improvement in respect of Involvement and Engagement, with a position statement on progress set out in Table 9.

Table 9: Position Statement on Progress: Involvement and Engagement

Area for Improvement	Position Statement of Progress / Outcomes
The data returned from the residents' survey should be used to further understand our communities, this will allow more informed decision making across the Council and we will be able to regularly access and use valuable, benchmarked data.	In 2025/26, resident feedback has continued to be used to inform service planning and delivery and this work will be built on moving forward to support wider representation from local groups and encourage wider participation. This work will also take into account additional questions on the Welsh language, developed by the Welsh Language Commissioner and Welsh Government, which are intended to strengthen the evidence base in support of statutory planning requirements, wider policy objectives, and the Council's five-year Welsh Language Promotion Strategy.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

The Council values insight from across our communities. As well as digital engagement methods ('Let's Talk') we provide a free post and telephone option and continue to improve our face-to-face engagement techniques to ensure that residents are not digitally excluded. This has included regular attendance at Neighbourhood Network meetings as well as utilising the Network Leaders to send information out through Networks via email and encouraging them to share information via their community contacts. We produce accessible engagement materials, such as easy read versions of our consultation documents e.g. the Annual Budget survey (Phase 1 and 2), Involvement and Engagement Strategy, Residential Care Consultation.

We also engage with young people and schools by hosting events in the Council Chamber on a regular basis. We have a good working relationship with the Children & Young People Service who provide the first point of contact in reaching young people who are directly affected by Council proposals and changes.

During the year, a number of consultation and engagement activities were undertaken that included face-to-face engagement events.

- We supported over 80 service consultations, with circa 17,000 responses received and analysed (an increase of around 6,000 more than the previous year). This is in addition to over 1,200 engaged people via the Let's Talk site.

The 'Let's Talk' platform allows us to collect and analyse information and helps to show what we have done as a result of what people tell us, although we are continuing to strengthen our approach. The

platform provides good data analytics. Using this data has improved our ability to use information arising from consultation and engagement projects to plan future work with a better understanding of successful engagement approaches.

- Over 6.500 total visitors have been logged across Let's Talk and Dewch i Siarad in 2025/26.
- 35.2% of visitors reached informed status, meaning that they viewed multiple pages and followed links to documents or other resources listed on a page, whilst 13.3% of visitors were engaged, meaning that the visitor took part in surveys, polls or other points of interactivity on the page/s they visited.
- Examples of the Let's Talk projects we have supported and led on include;
  - Let's Talk Budget
  - Let's Talk Tonypandy
  - Let's Talk Your Views
  - Let's Talk Eisteddfod Feedback

The Council's Involvement and Engagement activities have been developed and continue to grow. We engage with a wide range of individuals and groups, but we now need to develop our processes further to demonstrate the impact that we are having for our communities. The Council's new involvement Strategy and action plan will take this forward in 2026.

The Council approved a new RCT Involvement Strategy in 2025, after consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

- The Strategy aims to generate wider engagement across our communities that enables people to have input on the planning and delivery of Council services.
- It identifies a wide list of stakeholders that the Council should engage with, depending on the subject matter and statutory requirements.
  - Our stakeholder database is continually refreshed to ensure it remains relevant and fit for purpose so that it can maximise our reach in respect of key engagement projects.
- This work supports the Future Generations report, specifically the recommendation that 'Public bodies must increase engagement with the public to build trust, strengthen consensus, and bridge the gap between policymaking and citizens'.

As reported under the 'Performance' section of this self-assessment, the Council is reviewing the ways in which it is reporting outcomes and measures that will help to further demonstrate the impact that we are having for our communities, with this underpinned by the communication arrangements in place with residents.

Customer Feedback Scheme

The Customer Feedback Scheme records all Comments, Compliments and Complaints received from residents and visitors of the area (noting that the Scheme does not relate to statutory arrangements such as Social Care or Schools).

- The 2024/25 Customer Feedback Scheme – Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2023/24 Report was presented to Cabinet in November 2025. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales report and letter for 2024/25 was also considered at this meeting.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to Risk Management.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's engagement and involvement arrangements:

The Council is building on its existing strong performance framework to integrate its work on engagement and community resilience in measuring outcome and impact. The Council understands it needs to adopt a test and learn approach to the delivery of the change it wants to make and this needs to be done jointly with partners.

The Council is encouraged in taking forward this process to develop the skills and capacities to enable it (amongst other things): To evaluate the extent to which existing engagement approaches provide for and encourage participation and involvement.

Conclusion

The Council's involvement and engagement activities take in a wide range of individuals and groups to inform service delivery and this work will continue, informed by the Council's Involvement Strategy, to encourage participation and feedback and better demonstrate the impact Council services are having on our communities.

9. Welsh Language

The Council continues to positively promote the Welsh language both internally and in the community, and is well placed to deliver the requirements of the Welsh language and Education (Wales) Act 2025. This year, has seen further positive progress in the delivery of both the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy and Welsh in Education Strategic Plan, and positive evaluation of the Guaranteed Interview Scheme and further progress developing staff language skills. The development of an 'Internal Use of Welsh' Policy will further support our continuing ambitions to grow Welsh Language use within the County Borough.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

There were no areas for improvement reported in the 2024/25 annual self-assessment.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

Policies & compliance

The Council has a range of policies and procedures in place. These are provided in more detail in the Welsh Language Standards Report 2025-26 which was approved for publication by the Welsh Language Cabinet Sub-committee on 23rd June 2026.

The Welsh Language and Education (Wales) Act 2025 gained Royal Assent in July 2025, and is the most significant legislative development relating to the Welsh Language since the introduction of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

- Requirements of the legislation and the steps the Council is planning to take towards meeting them are set out in the report to Welsh Language Cabinet Sub-Committee in October 2025. This includes reviewing and refining its policies and procedures and setting ambitious targets for the use of the Welsh language in the workplace and the community.

We received 3 complaints relating to Welsh Language Standards in 2025/26 which is a reduction compared to the previous year where 5 were received. One was found not to be valid, one in still under investigation and the third has been resolved.

Governance

The Council has strong governance and accountability arrangements through the Welsh Language Cabinet Sub Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- Progress against the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-2027 was reported to the Welsh Language Cabinet Sub-Committee in October 25 and to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2025.
    - The report highlighted positive progress across a number of areas, particularly in our work with schools, engagement with community grant applicants to achieve Welsh language assessment criteria, increased delivery via the medium of Welsh in the Arts Service and launch of the Use My Cymraeg app.
    - Progress has been made in establishing more quantifiable targets for services to understand the impact of their work; however, data collection systems have not historically been in place to support this work. Further improvements to data collections and systems continue to be a focus going forwards.

- Progress on the delivery of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan was reported to Education & Inclusion Scrutiny Committee in September 2025.
    - Overall progress was noted as being positive with a RAG rating of Green, with good progress towards targets including an increase in the percentage of nursery aged learners receiving their education through the medium of Welsh (relating to the academic year 2024/25 - from 21.64% to 24.07%) and the percentage of reception aged learners remaining steady.

In their Future Generations Report published in April 2025, the FG Commissioner recommended that:

25. All public bodies in Wales should develop a clear plan to increase the internal use of Welsh within public bodies. This will allow staff to live their working lives increasingly through the medium of Welsh, fostering a stronger bilingual culture in the workplace.

The Council's work in this area was already progressing strongly prior to the publication of the recommendation and work has continued to strengthen the internal use of Welsh. Examples of this work are included in the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy update and include the pilot of the 'Siarad' staff initiative to support staff to use Welsh in the workplace.

Workforce

A range of training opportunities are available to staff at all levels, as detailed in the Annual Welsh Language Standards Report. In addition to supporting staff to develop their language skills, a 'Leading in a Bilingual Country' session was held with the Council's Senior Leaders, providing an opportunity for the Council's SLT to explore how to develop a bilingual culture within the Council. It is intended to develop training of this type for Managers to further strengthen our strategic approach.

- 13.6% of Council staff (non-teaching) staff were able to offer a service in Welsh (exceeding the target of 12.4%)
    - A revised future target has now been set by the Welsh Language Cabinet Sub-committee in October 2025 of at least 15%. Work planned to deliver this target includes continued training and the development of an 'Internal Use of Welsh' Policy.
- Future language planning across the Council is improving with better data.

Our Guaranteed interview scheme for Welsh speakers (introduced in July 2024) continued in 2025/26 with an update reported to the Welsh Language Cabinet Sub-Committee in October 2025. It was reported that the scheme continued to prove successful with a reported increase of 16% in Welsh-speaking candidates appointed or offered a post. This has contributed to an increase in the Welsh language profile of staff. The Welsh Language Commissioner recognised the scheme as good practice. More detail is shown in this short film.

Resources to support the Council

The Council continued to invest in the Welsh Service Team. The Team provide a key role for the Council in respect of, for example, the development of Policies, reporting progress into scrutiny, delivering training and monitoring compliance. The Team also deliver the simultaneous translation service who have benefitted from additional training during the year. This allowed us to expand our simultaneous translation services beyond committee meetings – such as theatre performances and public consultations. For example – providing a simultaneous translation service (into English) at several 'Scratch Night' events at The Park and Dare Theatre in Treorchy, so that non-Welsh speaking audiences could better understand the work.

Supporting the delivery of the Welsh Language Promotion Strategy 2022-2027 has been strengthened by the Welsh Language Strategy Co-Ordinator who was appointed in in April 2025.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to Welsh Language.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's Welsh Language arrangements:

The Panel Performance Assessment noted that –

> ***In the 2021 Census, 12.4% of RCT residents reported being able to speak Welsh (RCT scoping document). Although below the Wales average (17.8%), RCT was one of the few authorities to show an increase in Welsh speakers since the previous Census, reflecting the strong commitment to the Welsh language promotion strategy and Welsh in Education Strategic Plan in RCT.***

Conclusion

The Council continues to positively promote the Welsh language both internally and, in the community, and is well placed to deliver the requirements of the Welsh language and Education (Wales) Act 2025. With specific regard to the Council, the development of the Internal Use of Welsh Policy and action plan aims to further support the promotion and use of the Welsh language.

10. Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion

The Council continues to embed equality, diversity and inclusion across all aspects of the organisation, including strengthening governance arrangements via the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion steering group, supporting and developing our staff networks and launching a new anti-bullying and harassment policy. Good progress is being made in delivering the commitments of our strategic equality plan.

2024/25 Areas For Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

There were no areas for improvement reported in the 2024/25 annual self-assessment.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

The Council's Strategic Equality Plan 2024-28 (SEP) was agreed by Cabinet in March 2024. The SEP integrates within the framework set out within the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-30 'Working with our Communities' approved by Council in April 2024 and which also contains our commitment to fair and equal treatment for our staff and residents.

The Equality Plan sets out the following three Objectives:

1. **We will embed equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into every aspect of our service delivery.**
2. **We will attract applicants that represent the diversity of our communities, enriching our organisational capability to meet our ambitions.**
3. **We will respect, value and listen to all our employees by embedding a culture of inclusion.**

Delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) continues to be monitored through the bi-annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Group. Chaired by the Deputy Leader, the Steering Group provides oversight of our EDI priorities and continues to strengthen governance arrangements. A key focus has been the use of timely and robust data to demonstrate progress and evaluate the impact of our work, including through the annual Equality Monitoring Report, which supports our statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

We have continued to strengthen our Staff Equality Networks, which are supported at a senior level by dedicated Diversity Champions and the Deputy Leader. This ensures that staff voice is represented beyond influencing organisational change, the networks provide safe and supportive spaces for employees to connect, share experiences and access peer support. This sense of belonging contributes positively to employee wellbeing, helping to reduce isolation and build resilience across the workforce.

A revised set of EDI-related questions within the Self-Service Evaluation (SSE) has strengthened our ability to monitor progress which provides a transparent mechanism for challenge and support, ensuring EDI remains embedded within service planning and delivery.

A recent review of our recruitment processes identified several opportunities to further strengthen EDI considerations throughout the recruitment and onboarding process. The Human Resources team is currently developing proposals to address the areas identified and support more inclusive recruitment practices, and this work will be continued in 2026/27.

We continue to reinforce our zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, bullying and harassment across the organisation. The ongoing delivery of mandatory EDI training remains a key component of this work, helping to raise awareness, build capability and promote an inclusive workplace culture.

During the reporting period, we launched a new Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy, supported by a comprehensive programme of training and communication activity. Early evaluation indicates that complaints raised under the policy are being managed in a timely manner, providing confidence that the revised arrangements are supporting a more effective and responsive approach to addressing workplace concerns.

The most recent Annual Equality Report was considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 18th March 2026. The report outlined the work undertaken to deliver the 3 objectives set out above, including strengthening how we oversee equality work through setting up the new EDI steering group; improving the quality of workforce equality data through updates to iTrent and the rollout of Employee Self Service and strengthening organisational culture by introducing mandatory EDI learning, providing face to face training to frontline staff and increasing communication about our zero tolerance approach to bullying and harassment.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to equalities, diversity and inclusion.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

The Panel Performance Assessment provided the following feedback in respect of the Council's equalities, diversity and inclusion arrangements:

> ***A well-respected Council – The panel heard from a range of staff and Trade Union representatives that the leadership (political and officers) and the human resources function is well respected. The panel also met with representatives of several staff networks set up to advance the Council's diversity, equality and inclusion agenda. Representatives were positive about the commitment of the Deputy Leader and the Chief Executive, the development of the networks and the support they received from the EDI manager. The experience of change being effected across the management tiers was, however, said to be variable with more work to be done to embed the Council's policy intent in practice.***

Conclusion

The Equalities and Diversity Service continues to promote and support equality and diversity across the organisation, helping to ensure and monitor compliance and clear arrangements and plans are in place to deliver this work.

11. Climate Change and Carbon Reduction in RCT

The Council is committed to reducing the carbon impact of its activities. The latest Welsh Public Sector Net Zero Annual Report 2024/25 was submitted the Energy Efficiency & Decarbonisation Cabinet Sub-Committee in March 2026.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

There were no areas for improvement reported in the 2024/25 annual self-assessment.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

The Council's Decarbonisation Strategy and Action Plan continues to provide the strategic framework for reducing carbon emissions across the Council's operations. During 2025, work took place to review and update the actions required to decarbonise the Council's activities with the outcome of this work due to be reported into Scrutiny during the autumn of 2026. The review consisted of extensive engagement with officers across the Council to ensure that future priorities are aligned with service objectives and delivery programmes. To strengthen governance and performance management arrangements, the actions contained within the updated Action Plan will also be incorporated into the Council's Corporate Asset Management Plan, enabling consistent monitoring and reporting of progress going forward.

Key activities delivered during the year included:

- The Council's annual carbon footprint continued to be calculated in accordance with the Welsh Public Sector Net Zero Reporting Guide and was submitted to the Welsh Government by the required deadline of 1 September 2025 and reported to Scrutiny.
  - The reported total emissions across Scopes 1, 2 and 3 for 2024/25 were 122,560.47 tonnes CO_2e.
  - The has been published on the Council's 'Our Carbon Footprint' webpage to support transparency and accountability in the Council's decarbonisation journey.
  - Going forward, the Council will continue to submit annual emissions returns to the Welsh Government in line with national reporting requirements. The next submission, covering 2025/26 emissions data, is due in September 2026, with the results scheduled for consideration by the Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Cabinet Sub-Committee in November 2026.
- The Council continued with its **Carbon Reduction Programme**, delivering energy efficiency and carbon reduction projects across the Council's estate.
  - Our Carbon Reduction Programme work delivers on the Future Generation report recommendation

    14. Climate resilience and adaptation must become a core public service priority. By the end of 2027, Public Services Boards should assess climate risks for their communities, updating their findings every five years as part of their well-being assessments. Public bodies must integrate these findings into their corporate and strategic planning.
- Over and above the Carbon Reduction programme, the Council successfully secured additional **grant funding to deliver further projects**. The table below provides additional information in respect of the Council's ability to secure grant funding:

SUMMARY	FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24	FY 2024/25	FY 25/26	TOTAL
Requested	£293,050.25	£773,206.40	£1,108,319.00	£1,618,621.95	£3,793,197.60
Awarded	£293,050.25	£773,206.40	£858,589.00	£1,466,433.67	£3,391,279.32
Claimed	£289,859.00	£773,206.40	£812,748.88	£1,448,974.24	£3,324,788.52

- Continued its work with the Cardiff Capital Region in respect of the Local Energy Area Plan, with an update presented to the Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Cabinet Sub Committee in April 2026.
- Progressing a range of projects including the Living Landscape Project and the Peatbog Project which were presented to Scrutiny in March / April 2026.
- Progression of Project Outreach, highlighting key activities and progress towards Climate Change and Carbon Reduction awareness. Empowering Young Eco Avengers: Project Outreach Brings Sustainability to Schools
- Continued to support Fleet Colleagues in respect of the planned electric vehicle rollout by ensuring that appropriate charging infrastructure is in place. An update on progress was reported to the Energy Efficiency and Decarbonisation Cabinet Sub Committee at its meeting held in March 2026.

There are two specific Climate related risks in the Council's Strategic Risk Register Risks 24 and 26, with controls and actions in place, see update in Quarter 4 report to Cabinet on 13 July 2026 for completeness.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to climate change and carbon reduction.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

There were no specific findings in respect of climate change / carbon reduction as part of the Panel Performance Assessment.

Conclusion

The Council has a positive track record of delivering projects that improve the energy efficiency of its assets and in doing support the on-going decarbonisation of operations to reduce our carbon footprint, with arrangements in place to continue this programme of work into the future.

12. Corporate Safeguarding

The Council's Corporate Safeguarding Policy has been in place for a number of years and underpins the arrangements in place across the Council. The Policy provides a framework setting out how we can be assured that we are fulfilling our duties to safeguard the people that live across our communities and takes account of the Corporate Safeguarding Good Practice Guidance commissioned by the Welsh Government in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association. The Policy is subject to continuous review.

2024/25 Areas for Improvement – Position Statement on Progress

There were no areas for improvement reported in the 2024/25 annual self-assessment.

Other Key Areas of Focus in 2025/26

A Corporate Safeguarding Group, chaired by the Chief Executive, is responsible for ensuring that the Council carries out its responsibilities for the safeguarding of children and adults at risk, as set out in the Corporate Safeguarding Policy.

The Group ensures that robust arrangements for safeguarding are in place across the Council. This includes seeking assurances that the Council has effective performance management processes in place to fulfil its duties corporately and in partnership with other statutory agencies. The Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements are over and above the statutory requirements within the Education and Social Care Sector.

The Council's strategic importance of corporate safeguarding has also been incorporated into the Council's Corporate Plan 2024-30, approved by Council on 24 April 2024. The Council's Corporate Plan, 'Working with our Communities' contains four Well-being Objectives that are supported by underpinning Priorities, and a section that identifies the robust governance arrangements that need to be in place for our Council to be considered a 'Well-run Council'. Corporate Safeguarding is a key element of the Council's robust governance arrangements.

The Corporate Safeguarding Policy establishes a framework within which the Council can continue to discharge its safeguarding responsibilities to keep the most vulnerable people in our communities safe. The Corporate Safeguarding Framework comprises four areas of activity:

1. **Leadership and Culture**
2. **Professional Practice and Standards**
3. **Workforce, Recruitment and Selection**
4. **Governance, Scrutiny and Performance Management**

At its meeting held on 20 October 2025 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report that summarised the work delivered in respect of the Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements for 2024-25. The report considered by the Committee concluded that:

> ***The Council continues to have robust and effective arrangements in place in respect of its corporate safeguarding arrangements. Good work has been delivered during 2024/25 to strengthen our arrangements, but we know further work is required.***

A 2025/26 delivery plan, focused on the four areas of activity identified in the Corporate Safeguarding Policy, was developed and incorporated areas of work that were not fully implemented during 2024/25.

The Corporate Safeguarding Group met 4 times during the year; a key focus of the Group was to review progress against the agreed delivery plan. The delivery plan was monitored and reported using the Council's Performance Management Framework. A report that summarises the work delivered in respect of the Council's corporate safeguarding arrangements for 2025/26 will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Autumn 2026 but some of the specific deliverables are listed as follows:

Leadership and Culture

- Improved communications/awareness relating to RCT businesses and safeguarding requirements emerging from the Wales Corporate Safeguarding Good Practice Guide via Business Rates inserts.
- Worked closely with Partner agencies to launch the Regional Exploitation Strategy on the 1st September 2025.

Professional Practice and Standards

- Continued to ensure that safeguarding is included within tender packs and on procurement policy web pages, e.g. keeping people safe, whistleblowing and tackling modern slavery.
- Reviewed in detail the arrangements in respect of Elective Home Education.
- Ensured that relevant contracts are subject to ongoing cyber security risk assessments.

Workforce, Recruitment and Selection

- 'Keeping People Safe' mandatory training - over 4,500 staff had completed the training by March 2026 including almost 500 via face-to-face sessions.
- Appointed a dedicated Safeguarding Officer for the Education Directorate.
- Delivered training for staff in respect of cyber risks such as phishing and email attacks.

Governance, Scrutiny and Performance Management

- Launched AI Acceptable Use Policy to ensure that sensitive data is managed appropriately.
- Reviewed organisational data to provide a comprehensive view of safeguarding across the organisation.
- Reviewed the Corporate Safeguarding Policy as part of continuous review cycle and agreed it is fit for purpose.

A delivery plan detailing the work that will be delivered in 2026/27 has been prepared which incorporates those areas that have not been fully progressed in 2025/26. This will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Autumn 2026 alongside the annual progress report for 2025/26.

Audit Wales Reports

No Audit Wales reports were issued specifically in relation to corporate safeguarding.

Panel Performance Assessment Findings

There were no specific findings in respect of corporate safeguarding as part of the Panel Performance Assessment.

Conclusion

The Council continues to have robust and effective arrangements in place in respect of its corporate safeguarding arrangements. Positive work has been delivered in 2025/26 to further strengthen the arrangements, and a delivery plan is in place for 2026/27 that aims to build on these strong foundations.

13. Regulators Feedback

The Council continues to maintain constructive and productive relationships with its Regulators. Our approach to responding to Regulators' reports is open and transparent, with reports considered by the relevant committees. Details can be found here.

Positively, the Regulators feedback throughout the year reinforced the Council's own assessment of its strengths and opportunities / areas for improvement, particularly in the context of the significant financial and service challenges ahead.

3 SECTION

OVERALL CONCLUSION



Based on the review undertaken and the evidence in place, the Council's arrangements have provided the basis to maintain the organisation's financial stability and resilience, during a continued period of significant financial pressures and constrained funding, through robust planning, prioritisation and management of scarce resources. This position was underpinned by sound scrutiny and decision-making processes and well-established self-assessment arrangements, and supported Corporate Plan priority areas, wider service delivery and improved outcomes for service users. This overall opinion is consistent with the feedback from the Panel Performance Assessment.

The findings from the self-assessment process have identified strengths and opportunities / areas for improvement (Table 1), that will support a further strengthening of the arrangements in place. Accordingly, based on the self-assessment process the Council has demonstrated that it has exercised its functions effectively; used its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and that governance arrangements were effective for securing the above.

The opportunities / areas for improvement identified as part of the annual self-assessment process will be monitored throughout 2026/27 as part of the Council's performance management arrangements.