2021/22

Flintshire County Council
Corporate Self-Assessment

Final

What is the purpose of this document?

This document details the Council's Corporate Self-Assessment and identifies areas of best practise and areas for further improvement. The document explains:

1.   What is the Corporate Self–Assessment?

The Local Government and Elections Act (Wales) 2021 sets out a duty to report on performance and states '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 achieve the duty set out above for the act and for the use by the Council.

The Corporate Self-Assessment is a comprehensive assessment of the corporate organisation and not a detailed assessment of the performance of each service portfolio, the assessment themes are designed in this way.

The self-assessment is meant to provide a platform for assurance and self-improvement and would lead to an improvement plan for the organisation.

The Self-Assessment model focused on eight themes and considered a number of core questions within each of these themes outlined further in this document. As with all models there will inevitably be overlaps across themes however, the themes are sufficiently defined and demarked to avoid too much overlapping or duplication.

The Self-Assessment Model followed three stages:

- Stage One - 'desk-based' analysis and evaluation of available documents and evidence and some internal triangulation through review and moderation
- Stage Two - opinion sourcing, consultation and engagement and 'triangulation'
- Stage Three - production of a formal and final published assessment and improvement plan which will be led by the Cabinet and run through both the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Governance and Audit Committee for input and assurance.

The first stage was more evidential e.g., the presence of strategies and evaluative reports e.g. regulatory reports, the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), the Annual Performance Report. The second stage, more qualitative whilst the third stage is the closing stage involving the production and publication of a formal and final assessment and action plan.

2.   Process of Review and Timeframe

A timeframe to complete each of the three stages of the Corporate Self-Assessment was identified as follows:

Stage	Task	Timeline
One	Desk-based' analysis and evaluation of available documents and evidence and some internal triangulation through review and moderation	September 2021
Two	Opinion sourcing, consultation and engagement and 'triangulation'	January 2022
Three	This will be the closing stage and will involve the production of a formal and final published assessment and action plan which will be led by the Cabinet and run through both the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Governance and Audit Committee for input and assurance	By January 2023

A Project Board was established comprising of a Project Board Chair, a senior responsible officer, and officers from across portfolios that were either currently Performance Leads or officers who were part of the Governance Recovery Group during the Council's response phase to the pandemic. Each of the officers who sat on the Project Board were considered to have the ability to conceptualise new models and new ways of working, understand their portfolio services whilst having sufficient seniority within the Council to take the Self-Assessment forward.

We drew upon the Council's AGS model of evaluation and scoring and evidence capturing as this model was known to be effective. The model was a useful platform for challenging and moderating variations in opinion through facilitated review.

A report was shared at Governance and Audit Committee in July 2021 on the development of the Self-Assessment model, the proposed model for the first corporate self-assessment was endorsed.

The results of the Stage One were independently examined by Internal Audit and shared at a Senior Leadership Academi where the results were considered, challenged, and evaluated further. Based on the findings within the report, a consultation process was not undertaken for this year.

3.   Scoring Criteria:

Score 5 – Very best practice,   **Score 4** – Good evidence,   **Score 3** – Evidence but further action required,
Score 2 – Some evidence but lacking in key areas,   **Score 1** – No evidence

4.   Summary of the Effectiveness of the Council's Corporate Self–Assessment

Number of Questions within the Corporate Self-Assessment

Legend:
- Score 5 - Very Best Practice (3%)
- Score 4/5 (9%)
- Score 4 - Good Evidence (67%)
- Score 3/4 (15%)
- Score 3 - Evidence but Further Action Required (6%)
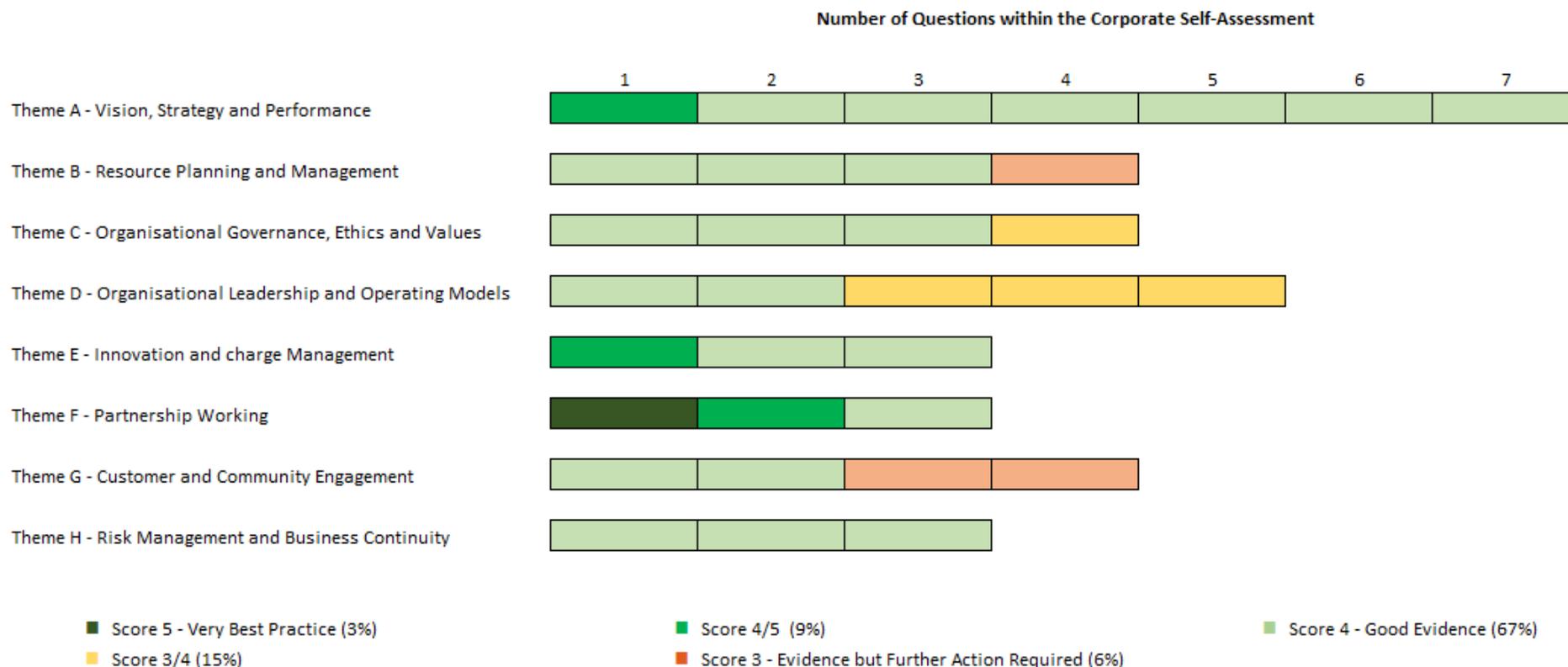
Areas of Very Best Practice:
- (F24) - Council engagement in local, regional and national partnerships and collaborations

Further Action Required:
- (B11) - Strategies sustainable, and dynamic, in adapting to change and the future
- (G27, G28) - Comprehensive and maintained plans and policies for customer and community engagement in place

5.   Key themes of the Corporate Self-Assessment

The eight key themes of the Corporate Self-Assessment are listed below:

Theme A   Vision, Strategy and Performance
Theme B   Resource Planning and Management
Theme C   Organisational Governance, Ethics and Values
Theme D   Organisational Leadership and Operating Models
Theme E   Innovation and Change Management
Theme F   Partnership Working
Theme G   Customer and Community Engagement
Theme H   Risk Management and Business Continuity

Against these themes, the Council reviewed whether:

- It was exercising its functions effectively
- It was using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively
- Governance was effective for securing the above.

Theme A – Vision, Strategy and Performance

Questions	How we do this / How we achieve this
A1 Does the Council have a set of corporate and service strategies in place which set out vision and ambition?	• Council Plan 2021-22 which sets out the Council's vision and ambition for the year. • A set of corporate and service strategies were in place which set out the Council's vision and ambition e.g. the Digital Strategy, MTFS and the Capital Strategy, etc.
A2 Are these strategies locked-in to national and regional Government strategy, and collaborative planning with key partners?	• The Council Plan priorities were clearly defined and locked into national and regional priorities and strategies. • The Council Plan 2021-22 identified clear linkages to national and regional policies/strategies which were captured in the document.
A3 Are these strategies being followed and are they achieving their aims and objectives?	• The Council Plan was reported at Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees for six monthly performance monitoring reviews. • The MTFS and Capital strategy were both updated annually alongside the Council's budget process. • Service Strategies were reviewed within their set timeframes (set timeframes varied between each of the strategies). • Reports were provided to the relevant committees stating whether strategies were meeting their agreed aims and objectives.
A4 Are these strategies sustainable, and dynamic, in adapting to change and the future?	• The Council Plan had an annual refresh in 2021/22 to ensure appropriateness. Engagement was conducted with all members of the Council and all Officers in several different ways which included committee meetings and management meetings.
A5 Are these strategies supported by portfolio service business plans which are consistent with the overall aims and objectives of the Council?	• During the year each Portfolio had recovery business plans in place which supported the Council Priorities set in the Council Plan. These replaced business plans which in the past had aligned the Council Plan. • Capital schemes included within the Capital Programme were selected based on priorities within the Council Plan and Portfolio Business Plans.
A6 Are these portfolio service plans being followed and are they achieving their aims, objectives, and performance targets?	• Portfolio Performance was tracked through Performance measures identified at the initial stage of the Pandemic. These were reported on a six-monthly basis to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
A7 Is there effective democratic oversight of portfolio service direction and performance?	• Performance reporting cycles that we had in place ensured that we had robust assurance and scrutiny in place. • Performance reports were approved by Cabinet and shared at relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Theme B – Resource Planning and Management

Questions		How we do this/how we achieve this
B8	Does the Council have comprehensive and maintained strategies for workforce, finance, procurement, and assets in place?	• The Council had a number of comprehensive and maintained strategies in place which included; People Strategy, MTFS, Housing Asset Management Strategy, Code of Corporate Governance, Procurement Strategy and a Capital Strategy.
B9	Are these strategies achieving their aims and objectives at a corporate level?	• Updates were provided to Cabinet and/or Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the progress of the strategies.
B10	Are these strategies achieving their aims and objectives at a portfolio level?	• Updates were provided to Cabinet and/or Overview and Scrutiny Committees on the progress of the strategies.
B11	Are these strategies sustainable, and dynamic, in adapting to change and the future?	• The Council's strategies were reviewed and updated annually. Reports were provided to the relevant Committees on the progress of these strategies. However, there were some areas between Portfolios and Corporate that could be improved. This included the timeliness of reviewing and monitoring key strategies and plans which sit below the Council Plan.

Areas identified for Further Improvement
• There were some areas between Portfolios and Corporate that could be improved. This included the timeliness of reviewing and monitoring key strategies and plans which sit below the Council Plan (B11).

Theme C – Organisational Governance, Ethics and Values

Questions	How we do this/how we achieve this
C12 Does the Council have comprehensive and maintained frameworks and codes in place for governance, ethics and values?	• The Council's Constitution, a comprehensive document, was reviewed and maintained during 2021-22. A 'user friendly' guide to the Constitution is being developed. • The Council's Code of Corporate Governance was reviewed and updated by the Corporate Governance Working Group which comprised of senior officers from the relevant portfolios. Their assessments were subject to challenge by statutory officers. • IA Report (ethics) - We ensured that the seven principles of public life were central to decision making. • Code of Conduct - Good conduct was of paramount importance and adherence to the code was ensured by the Council having a robust Standards Committee, the membership of which was refreshed through stringent recruitment of new lay members. • Suite of Policies and Procedures – The Council's policies and procedures must be kept relevant and focused, and they were updated as required. • We upheld Principle A of our Corporate Governance Framework, which requires us to behave with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law. Our Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was subject to Member challenge, and we plan greater Member involvement in preparing the Annual Governance Statement for 2022.
C13 How well are these frameworks and codes applied and observed?	• The AGS is a self-assessment of our Code of Corporate Governance based on the evidence and knowledge we have within the organisation and was reviewed by Audit Wales.
C14 Is the application of ethics and values evident in the way the Council appraises options and makes decisions?	• Strong corporate values are evidenced in the continued delivery of discretionary services/decisions made for the benefit of our residents despite financial pressures to cut such services.
C15 Does the Council work productively with its external regulators and demonstrate sound compliance?	• A robust ethical framework was in place - mapped through to monitoring and reporting structures. • The ethical framework was visible in the Constitution and supporting policies and protocols. • The Council had all policies and protocols expected of a forward-thinking council.

Theme D – Organisational Leadership and Operating Models

Question		How we do this/how we achieve this
D16	Is there strong and effective political leadership?	• The AGS, Principle A evidence identified a number of documents which set out Codes of Conduct along with the Code of Corporate Governance and also set out a standard to achieve. • During 2021/22 the Council had a minority Labour administration. The Council Leader had two deputies, who were, responsible for Governance and Partnerships. The leader of the largest opposition group was the leader of the Independent Alliance. The emphasis was on joint working: regular Group leaders' meetings were held between the leaders of each of the Council's political groups and attended by the statutory officers (Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service, Chief Officer (Governance)/Monitoring Officer, Corporate Finance Manager/Section 151 Officer and Head of Democratic Services).
D17	Is there strong and effective professional leadership?	• The AGS Principle A evidenced identified a number of documents which set out Codes of Conduct along with the Code of Corporate Governance which also sets out a standard to achieve. • Strong and professional leadership was provided through the Chief Officer Team (COT) and the portfolio Department Management Teams, supported by the senior Leadership Academy, comprising of Chief Officers and their portfolio Service Managers.
D18	Does the Council have an adopted organisational operating model and a preferred working culture?	• The Council's 'flat structure' operating model was adapted in 2014, following an extensive review. The original structure of Chief Executive and nine Chief Officers moved to one of a Chief Executive and six Chief Officers.
D19	How effective is the operating model?	• The structure was effective, and this was demonstrated by the performance of the organisation at corporate performance level and the performance across a number of various projects in which the different areas worked in a collaborative way.
D20	Is it evident that the preferred working culture is pre-dominant and effective?	• The working culture was collegiate with officers from different portfolios working together on projects.

Theme E – Innovation and Change Management

Question		How we do this/how we achieve this
E21	Does the Council have a proven appetite for innovation and change management?	• The Council Plan was an ambitious document and has been for a number of years. Target dates, measures and actions were stretched/ambitious but realistic in nature. Within the Council Plan there were a number of examples that demonstrated innovation and change management.
E22	How well has the Council implemented its chosen innovation and change programmes and projects against time, budget, transition and performance objectives and targets?	• Performance of the Joint Social Value Procurement Strategy demonstrated progress made against the strategy. `
E23	How well does the Council compare to its peers in being an innovator?	• Audit Wales carried out a Review of local authorities during the pandemic and the Council was reviewed in a number of areas for innovation and change management to ways of working, collaborations, partnership working, technological development – Audit Wales Review.

Theme F – Partnership Working

Question		How we do this/how we achieve this
F24	Does the council engage well in local, regional, and national partnerships and collaborations?	• There was a wide amount of evidence throughout a number of documents which demonstrated engagement locally, regionally and nationally. Examples of these documents included the Public Services Board - Wellbeing Plan, Joint Public Service Board Plan, Council Plan 2021/22, AGS - Principle B, Code of Corporate Governance and Regional Emergency Planning.
F25	Do the partnerships and collaborations for which the council is (co) responsible/relies upon have sound and effective governance arrangements in place?	• Clear terms of reference were agreed where necessary to ensure clarity of the governance arrangements. For example, the Public Service Board Terms of Reference set out the Governance arrangements for the Board.
F26	How well do the key partnerships and collaborations for which the council is responsible/relies upon perform against their aims and objectives?	• Performance of key partnerships and collaboration was strong, an example of this was the performance of Aura Leisure and Libraries against the business plan it set.

What has worked well during 2021/22 (Area of Best Practice)
• Engagement in local, regional, and national partnerships and collaborations (F24)

Theme G – Customer and Community Engagement

Question	How we do this/how we achieve this
G27 Does the Council have comprehensive and maintained plans and policies for customer and community engagement in place?	• The Council had a corporate strategy for delivery of Customer Services for, Face to Face, Telephone and Online. • Core principles for public engagement and consultation were adopted in 2012 to underpin the Welsh National Principles for Public Engagement.
G28 Does the Council use customer and community feedback effectively in reviewing performance and shaping services?	• Services engaged with customers and communities to gain feedback on performance to help shape services.
G29 How well does the Council perform in meeting its customer services standards and targets?	• Performance against Corporate Complaints was monitored and reported to Cabinet, Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Governance and Audit Committee as well as annually to the PSOW annual letter and half yearly update. The Chief Officers Team received monthly performance reports.
G30 How well does the Council engage with stakeholders in framing policy and in the making of key service policy decisions?	• Engagement with key stakeholders such as partners had been identified in the AGS as working well. There was strong evidence of partnership working, relationship management and formal and informal partnerships.

Areas identified for Further Improvement
• The Core Principles for public engagement and consultation document is nearly 10 years old and needs review (G27) • There was no forward work programme for corporate engagement activity which leaves a disjunction between corporate and portfolio activity (G27) • Lack of understanding across all portfolios of what consultation/engagement is taking place with who, when and why (G27) • Insufficient understanding of who our range of stakeholders were (G27) & (G28)

Theme H – Risk Management and Business Continuity

Question		How we do this/how we achieve this
H31	Does the Council have comprehensive and maintained strategies for risk management and business continuity in place?	• Risk management had a review in early 2020, this assisted greatly in managing the Council through the pandemic and ensuring good risk management was embedded. • Risk Registers for each portfolio were produced and for Recovery areas of the organisation at a corporate level.
H32	Have these strategies proved effective in real-time and/or test scenario settings?	• The newly developed Risk Management User Guide was rolled out during the early response phase of the Pandemic. Timelines were accelerated and training implemented. Over two months risk registers for each portfolio were developed together with a corporate recovery risk register. These risk registers continued to be managed and maintained throughout 2021/22.
H33	Are these strategies dynamic in adapting to change and ensuring resilience for the future?	• The Risk Management User Guide was reviewed and shared with Governance and Audit Committee for review and agreement of the framework. Development takes place yearly to ensure the latest trends and best practice is being upheld.

6.   Conclusion and Opportunities for Improvement

The Project Board engaged with all who took part in the Self-Assessment. Over based on the range of questions asked against the eight Theme it is considered that the Council:

a)   Does exercise its functions effectively,
b)   Uses its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively, and
c)   Has governance is effective for securing the matters set out in paragraphs

This is consistent with the Council Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Performance Report for the year 2021/22.   There is always areas where we strive for improvement and the following list of opportunities have been identified following engagement which are felt can be achieved in the short term and have some real benefits in doing so.

Opportunity for improvement	Target Completion Date	Theme which it contributes to	Owner	Progress RAG	Progress Comment
Forward work programme of consultation/engagement activity across all portfolios to be generated and shared on the web (G27)	March 2024	G - Customer and Community Engagement	Rebecca Jones Gill Watkins	Amber	A programme of consultation and engagement activity across the Council is to be developed based on the input from all portfolios. The outcome of this will be published on our website.

Opportunity for improvement	Target Completion Date	Theme which it contributes to	Owner	Progress RAG	Progress Comment
1) The creation of a consultation and engagement database to be used by all services to register their consultation and engagement activity (G27) 2) The development of a consultation and engagement portal on Flintshire's website to provide a central resource for closed, current and future consultations/engagement undertaken by the Council (G27) 3) The creation of a consultation and engagement stakeholder database to hold the details of a wide range of network information to ensure that when engaging we are reaching as far and as wide as possible including with the protected characteristic groups (G27) (G28)	March 2025	G - Customer and Community Engagement	Rebecca Jones Gill Watkins	**Amber**	The Digital Strategy Board rejected a business case to develop a local solution owing to competing priorities and capacity within IT. A third-party solution was due to be procured but a shift in budget priorities resulted in a pressure bid being withdrawn as non-essential spend. The opportunities are long term ambitions subject to funding and/or capacity to develop our own solution.
Review the national position in relation to the National Principles and their standing across Wales - review and reaffirm our commitment depending on outcome of research (G27)	September 2023	G - Customer and Community Engagement	Rebecca Jones	**Green**	Refreshed National Principles have recently been released by WLGA (August 2022) and these will be communicated to the workforce. They have been updated on our website.
Look at workforce strategies to allow for more flexibility in resource planning and responding to recruitment challenges (B11)	January 2023 - Complete October 2023	B - Resource Planning and Management	Chief Officer Team	**Green**	Revised vacancy management approval process in place to ensure critical posts are prioritised for recruitment. Recruitment/retention are two of the main themes in the new people strategy (currently in development) and the new People priority in the Council Plan. Initiatives include a new workforce planning framework.

7.   Certification

The Corporate Self-Assessment undertaken provides a comprehensive assessment of the organisation and provides a platform of assurance.

Opportunities to improve have been identified through this review. We pledge our commitment to addressing these issues over the coming year and we will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed on behalf of Flintshire County Council

Neal Cockerton – Chief Executive   **Cllr. Ian B Roberts – Leader of the Council**