

Conwy County Borough Council

Annual Governance Statement 2023-2024

1 Introduction

Conwy County Borough Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. It has a duty under the Local Government and Election (Wales) Act 2021, to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 repeals the performance duties which were set out in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. The Act came into force beginning on 1st April 2021. The new performance and governance regime, (other than the provisions relating to panel performance assessments), applies to councils from, the 2021-22 financial year onwards. It requires councils to undertake an annual self-assessment of performance, and answer the questions:

- 1) Is the Council exercising its functions effectively?
- 2) Is the Council using its resources economically, efficiently, and effectively?
- 3) Does the Council have effective governance in place for securing the above?

The second self-assessment for 2022-2023 has been approved and published on the council website and is available [here](#). The Council is now preparing its third self-assessment for 2023-2024, which will be reported to democracy in autumn 2024.

The third question, 'Does the Council have effective governance in place?' is answered by the self-assessment in this Annual Governance Statement.

The Council has a **Local Code of Corporate Governance** that is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government and a **Governance Framework** which comprises the policies, procedures, behaviours and values by which the Council is controlled and governed. This statement is an evaluation of compliance with the Local Code and whether governance arrangements effectively support the delivery of Corporate Objectives. The Statement also meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014, which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an annual governance statement.

2 What is Governance?

Corporate governance is the system by which an organisation is directed and controlled.

A good governance structure will include as a minimum:

- Clear governance standards by which an organisation will be governed

- Governance roles and responsibilities
- A mechanism for measuring an organisation's performance against its governance standards.

To be successful an organisation must have a solid foundation of good governance and sound financial management.

3 Corporate Governance Arrangements

Conwy County Borough Council is committed to ensuring good governance principles and management practices are adopted in all business activities to ensure public trust.

3.1 The Local Code of Governance

The Local Code of Governance provides a public statement that sets out the way in which the Council meets and demonstrates compliance with the CIPFA Governance principles.

3.2 The Governance Framework

The Local Code is underpinned by a Governance Framework which comprises the policies, procedures, behaviours and values by which the Council is controlled and governed.

3.3 The Annual Governance Statement

The Annual Governance Statement provides assurances over the Council's Governance arrangements, together with identifying areas of future focus and improvement. The purpose of the Annual Governance Statement is to report publicly on the extent to which the Council complies with its local code of governance. It identifies those areas which have been identified as needing improvement following self-assessment.

3.4 Annual Governance Statement Action Plan

The Council continues to review the self-assessment areas of improvement and they are monitored through the Annual Governance Statement Action plan.

4 Sources of assurance for this evaluation:

Assurance required for: Delivery of Corporate Plan priorities.	Sources of assurance are: Corporate and service plans.	Assurance is received through: Annual Report.
Assurance required for: Services are delivered economically, efficiently & effectively.	Sources of assurance are: Service performance reviews. Strategic equality plan. Annual self-assessment.	Assurance is received through: Corporate performance report. Strategic equality plan annual report. Scrutiny annual review. Governance and Audit Committee review and challenge.

		Panel performance assessment (once every administration).
Assurance required for: Management of risks and issues.	Sources of assurance are: Risk and issue management framework. Corporate and service risk and issue registers. Service performance reviews.	Assurance is received through: External challenge from Audit Wales. Scrutiny review and challenge. Governance and Audit Committee review and challenge.
Assurance required for: Financial planning and performance.	Sources of assurance are: Financial performance monitoring reports. Medium term financial strategy. Financial procedures. Monitoring of economic indicators & associated financial receipts.	Assurance is received through: Regular performance and financial reporting. Annual statement of accounts.
Assurance required for: Effectiveness of internal controls.	Sources of assurance are: Constitution (incl. statutory officers, scheme of delegation, financial management and procurement rules). Council, Cabinet, committees and panels. Strategic Leadership Team/Senior Management Team. External regulation. Internal audits.	Assurance is received through: External audit reports. Internal audit reports. Conwy Conversation records. Head of Service assurance documented as part of annual assurance consultation meetings.
Assurance required for: Community engagement & public accountability.	Sources of assurance are: Community involvement Strategy. Engagement forward work programme. Complaints' policy.	Assurance is received through: Community engagement feedback. Lessons learned. Ombudsman reports.
Assurance required for: Project management & project delivery.	Sources of assurance are: Programme and project management framework.	Assurance is received through: Benefits realisation plan outputs. Lessons learned report.
Assurance required for: Procurement processes	Sources of assurance are: Contract procedure rules. Financial Regulations.	Assurance is received through: Value for money evidenced. Challenge contracts awarded.
Assurance required for: Roles & responsibilities of Members & Officers.	Sources of assurance are: Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer and S151	Assurance is received through: External Inspections.

	Officer.	Annual Review with Cabinet.
Assurance required for: Standards of conduct & behaviour.	Sources of assurance are: HR policies & procedures. Codes of conduct.	Assurance is received through: Compliments and complaints received. The role of the Standards Committee regarding assurances on standards of conduct and behaviour.
Assurance required for: Training and development of Members & Officers.	Sources of assurance are: Corporate learning and development plan. Member development plan.	Assurance is received through: Staff survey. Conwy Conversation records. Training records. Mandatory training completion reports. Councillor annual reports.
Assurance required for: Compliance with laws & regulations, internal policies & procedures.	Sources of assurance are: Policy framework. Information management strategy. Digital strategy. Cyber resilience strategy. Welsh language standards. Welsh language promotion strategy. Health and safety policy. Internal audit reports. Whistleblowing & other countering fraud arrangements.	Assurance is received through: Independent external inspections. Welsh language annual report. Health and safety annual report.

Two key pieces of assurance are provided by Internal and External Audit.

The Head of Internal Audit stated in the 2023/2024 annual Audit Opinion that the Council’s internal control environment and systems of internal control provided satisfactory assurance over key business process and financial systems to manage the achievement of the organisation’s objectives. Risk based audit planning through the Council’s assurance map has been used to ensure sufficient assurance is available to support the annual opinion. Working practices have continued to evolve to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of internal audits, with increased focus on areas of risk identified within the assurance map and a shift away from cyclical auditing processes. The internal audit plan continues to provide the required flexibility and alongside direct internal audit work the Head of Internal Audit has also drawn on additional sources of assurance, which are summarised as follows:

- Results of all audits undertaken during the year ended 31st March 2024;
- Results of follow-up action taken in respect of audits performed during the previous year;
- Whether any major or critical category of recommendations have not been accepted by management and the consequent risks;
- The effects of any material changes in the organisation’s objectives or activities;
- The service has in place a comprehensive assurance map to ensure that those areas of

greatest priority are focused upon, assurance gaps are filled and that there is no 'over assurance' in any activity;

- The work performed by Audit Wales and other external regulators;
- Matters arising from previous reports to the Governance & Audit Committee;
- The work of the Improvement and Audit Group to monitor corporate risks and issues to ensure all critical and major risks and corporate issues have been identified throughout the Authority;
- Gaining assurance that external funding flows have been well managed and that appropriate governance and accountability for the use of public money was in place;
- The service has met with Strategic Directors and Heads of Service to identify new or emerging areas of risk, developments within their areas of responsibility or the impact of new legislation.

The Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24 was presented to the Audit & Governance Committee on 20 May 2024.

The report concludes that the Authority has satisfactory internal control, risk management and corporate governance processes in place to manage the achievement of the Authority's objectives for the 12 months ended 31st March 2024. 86% of the planned audits completed during the year were assessed as providing positive levels of assurance. 4 of the planned audits completed were assessed as providing a limited level of assurance and related to: cyber resilience; Welsh Government Housing Support grant for 2022/23; home to school transport; and Welsh Rugby Union rugby matches at Stadium CSM, Eirias Park. Follow up audits are scheduled for 2024/25 to ensure effective implementation of the recommendations.

The findings in respect of follow up audits conducted during 2023/24 were reported to Governance & Audit Committee on a quarterly basis. Of the 13 follow ups the service performed during the year, 74 of the recommendations have been fully implemented. 15 recommendations remain outstanding and 56 are in progress. The 3 major recommendations that remain in progress are in regard to Corporate Procurement (part 1); Parent Pay and primary school meals arrears; and equal pay and job evaluation. For 8 of the follow up audits, the audit opinion improved to high assurance; for 3 of the follow ups, the audit opinion improved from limited to satisfactory assurance.

The draft 2022/23 financial statements were prepared and provided to the auditor in July 2023. The audit of the financial statements was delayed as a result of resource issues in Audit Wales but was concluded in May 2024 with an unqualified audit opinion. The Annual Audit Summary for 2023 is available [here](#).

5 Review of Effectiveness - How do we know our arrangements are working?

This statement builds upon the CIPFA 'Good Governance in Local Government 2020 Practitioner Update'. Conwy County Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Senior Management Team within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates. The effectiveness of the governance framework has been evaluated through review by the Improvement and Audit Group, and the Senior Management Team.

DEFINITION OF ASSURANCE RATINGS

The following assurance rating matrix has been used to self-assess our governance controls.

HIGH ASSURANCE (GREEN)	<p>Key controls are in place to ensure the achievement of service objectives and to protect the Authority against significant foreseeable risks and are applied consistently and effectively. No significant or material errors were found.</p> <p>Low priority actions required to manage and mitigate risks, which are easily managed.</p>
SATISFACTORY ASSURANCE (YELLOW)	<p>Key controls exist to enable the achievement of service objectives and to mitigate against significant foreseeable risks. However, there was some inconsistency in application and opportunities still exist to mitigate further against potential risks.</p> <p>Some opportunities still exist to mitigate further against potential risks.</p> <p>Some risk of loss, fraud, impropriety or damage to reputation.</p>
LIMITED ASSURANCE (AMBER)	<p>Key controls are in place and to varying degrees are complied with but there are gaps in the process which leave the service exposed to risks. Objectives are not being met or are being met without achieving value for money.</p> <p>There is a need to introduce additional controls and/or improve compliance with existing ones, to reduce the risk exposure to the Authority.</p> <p>A high risk of loss, fraud, impropriety or damage to reputation.</p>
NO ASSURANCE (RED)	<p>Key controls are considered to be insufficient with the absence of at least one critical control mechanism. There is also a need to improve compliance with existing controls and errors and omissions have been detected.</p> <p>Key controls do not exist and objectives are not met or are being met without achieving value for money.</p> <p>The Authority is exposed to very significant risk, which could lead to major financial loss, reputational risk of embarrassment or failure to achieve key service objectives.</p>

The **Three Lines of Defence Assurance Model** is central to the evaluation of effectiveness.

The Authority has in place well established processes to ensure it exercises its functions effectively. The service performance review and self-assessment processes are effective in monitoring and evaluating the Council's delivery of its strategic and regulatory commitments; how well issues and risks are being managed and whether financial and non-financial resources are being used economically, effectively and efficiently.

These evaluation mechanisms are underpinned by a sound performance management framework embedded at every level of the organisation, to drive improvement and ensure compliance. The process for strategic and service planning ensures priorities at a service level are directly aligned to Corporate objectives and resources are identified and allocated appropriately; the process for risk and issue management ensures that risks and issues both at a service and Corporate level are controlled; the process for performance measurement ensures progress is closely tracked and timely interventions applied where appropriate. The effectiveness of these processes is tested via robust external and internal audit, scrutiny and challenge.

1. First line of defence

Under the first line of defence, operational managers have ownership, responsibility and accountability for directly assessing, controlling and mitigating risks. Heads of Service are

required to assist the preparation of the AGS for the Council by providing an assurance statement for the internal control framework within their service. Each Head of Service is responsible for delivering the outcomes set out in their service plan. They are responsible for identifying and managing the risks and issues that may affect service delivery. This work includes monitoring the effectiveness of controls put in place to mitigate the risks and issues and carrying out remedial action where controls are weak or not in place.

Twice yearly service performance reviews (SPRs), remain in place. They provide assurance that services have sound governance arrangements. The mid-year service performance reviews for 2023/24 provided assurance that services were making progress in delivering the Corporate and service priorities, that risks and issues were being managed and regulatory compliance was being achieved. However, the significant financial and resource challenges faced by every service continued to be the main focus of the review discussions. Budget reductions, cost increases, recruitment and retention challenges and staff absence, compounded by increasing service demand, continue to place considerable pressure on the Council's ability to sustain the current level of progress and performance. There is agreement generally between officers and members that the current levels of service provision cannot be sustained with such resource difficulties and without negatively impacting staff wellbeing.

The Corporate Plan progress report 2023/24 for the Corporate Plan 2022-2027 was presented to democracy with an overall rating as follows:

'Overall satisfactory progress is being made to deliver the Council's outcomes despite staff and councillors working within a very challenging economic environment where resources and capacity are being stretched'.

Conwy has a sound track record of controlling and managing its revenue budget. However as a result of significant pay and price inflation and other cost pressures as well as increased demand for services which particularly support our most vulnerable residents, it is becoming significantly harder to contain spend within the available budget. As the scale of the pressures became apparent in 2023/24, action was taken in year to contain expenditure, which helped to reduce spend in excess of budget. The final outturn position resulted in the Council exceeding its budget by £1.4m which was funded by reserves. The vast majority of the planned savings were successfully delivered by services.

Given the continued financial pressure, the Council is taking active steps to plan and manage its financial position in future years, including the use of benchmarking to provide budget challenge, assessing service levels in the context of statutory duties and Member led budget working groups to consider the future shape of service delivery.

Assurance Rating Satisfactory Assurance

2. Second line of defence

The second line of defence consists of an oversight and monitoring of activities covered by several components of internal governance (audit compliance, risk and issue management, performance, financial control etc.). This line of defence monitors and facilitates the implementation of effective governance practices by operational management and assists in reporting information up and down the organisation. A series of reports are written throughout the year including the Corporate Plan annual report, financial reports, equality reports, information governance, scrutiny reports, Welsh language reports – all of which are listed in the Governance Framework.

The CIPFA Financial Management Code sets financial management standards which are

designed to support good practice and assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. Local government bodies face continued challenge to their financial resilience as a result of the significant pressure and demand on services. The economic instability has only served to exacerbate these pressures resulting in new and significant financial challenges over the coming years. In December 2023, the Council refreshed its medium term financial plan, which sets out the Council's anticipated budget requirement for the next 2 financial years and plans how to manage the resource requirement within the funds available. The plan covers a two-year period, rather than three to five years, due to the very significant financial and economic uncertainty that the Council faces. Despite the comparatively short period of the plan, its aim is to help put the Council's finances on a sustainable footing for the longer term.

All reports requiring political approval have been presented to either Cabinet or Council for approval and where appropriate to one of the four Scrutiny & Overview Committees for review and challenge. The reports in the main identify that the Authority is making good progress to meet corporate objectives and other supporting strategies, but there are significant challenges relating to resources and capacity. The reports are balanced and identify areas for improvement where needed. A forward work programme is in place to ensure reports are presented in a timely manner and are regularly reviewed by the chairs of Scrutiny with governance officers.

Assurance Rating: Satisfactory Assurance

3. Third line of defence

Internal audit forms the organisation's third line of defence. An independent internal audit function with a risk-based approach to its work, provides assurance to senior management. This assurance covers how effectively the organisation assesses and manages governance and includes assurance on the effectiveness of the first and second lines of defence. In total, in 2023/24 Internal Audit gave 28 audit opinions, of which 16 were high assurance, 8 were satisfactory assurance and 4 were limited assurance. There were no audit conclusions of no assurance.

Audit Wales provides an opinion on the statement of the accounts and the governance of the authority. Estyn and Care Inspectorate Wales provide an opinion on the governance and management of Social Care and Education. The audit reports from the 3 regulators overall conclude that there are good governance arrangements in place within the Authority.

Corrective actions arising from internal and external audit recommendations are closely monitored to ensure they are implemented and effective in addressing the area(s) of risk identified, further enhancing the authority's governance arrangements.

[Audit Wales reports](#)

[Estyn audit reports](#)

[CIW Audit reports](#)

[CCBC Internal Audit External Quality Assessment](#)

Assurance Rating: High Assurance

Key Governance Self-Assessment Questions

1. Are Governance Arrangements effective in supporting delivery?

This year's AGS covers a period of time when the Authority was continuing to respond to a volatile and challenging economic environment, rising inflation and substantial cost increases, resulting in significant financial pressures and challenges.

Stakeholder Engagement:

Community and stakeholder engagement remains an integral part of the Council's governance processes. The council is required under engagement provisions within the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 to seek the views of a prescribed list of statutory consultees on how it is performing against its functions, including with local businesses, community councils, trade unions, partners, as well as residents and staff. Seeking the views and input of those who use its services and those who help to deliver its services remains critical in continuing to deliver its functions effectively and use resources economically, efficiently and effectively.

Using the feedback from community and stakeholder engagement is a vital part of continuing to shape and improve services, deliver what people need and sustain the County for future generations.

There is a Corporate Plan wellbeing outcome focused on informing, including and listening to our communities, & adapting how we work to ensure we provide a variety of ways for people to communicate, collaborate and engage with our services.

During 2023-24, the Council ran a more detailed public consultation on its budget, explaining the very challenging financial situation and asking people for their views on how the Council should prioritise and allocate its very limited financial resources. The survey asked respondents for their views on which services are important to them and their local community. There was a good response rate and the feedback is being used to inform the Council's decision-making and build financial and service resilience.

Good officer and member relationships have been maintained and continued to support the gathering of community views via informal feedback from members through their community knowledge. This strengthens the relationships between the Council and communities, providing the Council with vital feedback in order to continue to shape and deliver services people need.

The Council has arrangements to regularly engage with the recognised trade unions. There are joint meetings between officers, members and the three unions, Unison, GMB and Unite, in the form of the Corporate Joint Consultative Committee and union consultation meetings, where there are opportunities to discuss the challenges facing the Council as an employer, discuss corporate decisions that may impact on the organisation's employees and share information about the Council's performance in accordance with the Social Partnerships and Procurement Act. In addition there are regular meetings with recognised Trade Unions who represent Education colleagues – National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) Cymru, the National Education Union (NEU) Cymru, Voice, and Undeb Cenedlaethol Athrawon Cymru (UCAC).

During 2023-24, a series of workshops were held with the Cabinet and Senior Management Team to discuss ways the Council can build its resilience to manage the short term challenges whilst putting the Council on a sustainable footing for the medium to longer term. This work has continued into 2024-25 with the aim of developing short, medium and longer term action plans aligned to the Corporate Plan outcome 9 'Conwy Council is resilient'.

Time to Change Wales initiatives continued during the year to tackle stigmas around mental health and support staff wellbeing. A range of activities took place to raise awareness and promote opportunities to have conversations about mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Involvement of staff has gradually been increasing and is still recognised as a need in the workplace given the level of staff absence owing to stress and anxiety. There are now over 30 Time to Change Champions across the organisation who meet quarterly.

Strategic Planning:

Having in place strategic plans aligned to the Council's wellbeing objectives is critical in ensuring national and local priorities are delivered effectively and statutory obligations are met. These plans underpin everything that the Council does and provide effective roadmaps to improve performance and operational efficiency and respond effectively to macro-environmental risks and opportunities. The Council's strategic plans are underpinned by sound research and data to inform decision-making.

Corporate strategies, finances and service plans are aligned to the Corporate Plan wellbeing objectives.

The culture of outcome based planning is embedded in the corporate planning and service planning processes.

All key strategic plans and corporate risks and issues are aligned to the relevant wellbeing objective and all reports submitted for democratic approval must evidence how they support the Well-being of Future Generations Act and to which Corporate Plan wellbeing objective and/or risk and/or issue they contribute.

All strategic plans are produced after implementing community engagement processes and are supported with resource management. There are positive links between strategic and financial planning which continue to be built upon.

Key Decisions:

The Council is publicly accountable to the communities it serves and is required to demonstrate openness and transparency in all decisions made. Providing opportunities for communities to access, scrutinise and challenge the Council's decisions and having a clear, audit trail of how decisions are made builds community trust and provides assurance that public resources are being used economically, effectively and ethically.

Key decisions reflect the impact on a number of factors, including sustainability, and the Authority continues to embed the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 by ensuring that the Act has been considered in all key plans and all key decisions presented to democracy.

To further improve governance and the integration of business processes, we internally managed the successful realignment of the Senior Management Team areas of responsibility for some Heads of Service. This included the Senior Employment Committee's successful recruitment and appointment of a new post, a Head of Strategic Housing, in order to provide greater focus and resilience for the significant challenges relating to affordable housing and homelessness.

Performance Management:

Effective performance management is a crucial part of ensuring the Council delivers its statutory, national and local priorities, uses its resources in the most efficient and effective way, manages risks and challenges and drives continuous improvement.

Value for Money: the Council's Procurement policies include community benefits. They are an important part of our awarding criteria, as is value for money in itself. Contract procurement rules require that managers demonstrate value for money which therefore may not always be the cheapest option.

The Conwy Opportunities Board, service performance reviews, programme and project boards all

provide opportunities for review, challenge and discussions for improvement. The staff suggestion scheme also invites staff to put forward ideas for improvement. However, this scheme is not widely used but staff can raise ideas through their regular Conwy Conversation check-ins.

Annual Reports and highlight reports from programme and projects are evidence that in the main, our objectives are being delivered despite the current significant financial challenges. Over recent years we have had to adjust targets and in some areas made a decision for managed decline in alignment with reduced budgets.

Where there is evidence of performance in need of improvement, action plans are put in place and monitored.

Relevant staff responsible for the implementation of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 have developed and implemented action plans.

During 2023-24, the annual performance report and self-assessment report were combined into one report to provide greater synergy and coordinated oversight of how well we are progressing our wellbeing objectives and overall performance as a Council. A risk and issue dashboard was introduced to provide greater strategic oversight and evaluation of how well risks and issues are being managed, tracking direction over time to evaluate the effectiveness of management controls and mitigating actions.

2. Are there barriers to achievements?

The most significant barriers to achievement in 2023/24 included: the lack of a strategic vision for asset management; the sustainability of the social care sector; the impact of the health board special measures' status; increasing homelessness and lack of affordable housing; and difficulties in recruiting to vacant posts in key service areas as well as deleting some vacant posts in order to meet budget reduction targets.

During 2023/24 our corporate issues were:

Issue Ref.	Issue Description
CI 1	That demographic changes, such as a declining birth rate, are impacting on school places in primary schools and this will impact on secondary schools in the future.
CI 10	The cost of specialist / independent education placements have increased significantly over the last 2 years and this is putting financial pressure on the service.
CI 11	No capacity to undertake environmental enforcement.
CI 13	Inability to recruit certain positions across the authority
CI 15	The social care sector is not sustainable and cannot meet the growing needs of the population as a result of the funding, recruitment, trust and confidence crises in the sector impacting on the availability of staff, placements and packages of care.
CI 17	Lack of suitable affordable housing provision.
CI 18	Homelessness levels have increased.
CI 19i	We have insufficient resources to deliver essential care packages within the domiciliary care sector as a result of staff leaving the sector and general recruitment problems.
CI 19ii	There are insufficient resources to deliver essential care packages within the residential care sector as a result of general issues relating to pay, terms and

	conditions.
CI 21	The deterioration of partnership arrangements with BCU is resulting in ineffective collaboration leading to delayed and ineffective decision making and inefficient working practices.
CI 22	We do not have a strategic vision for our assets.

However, that said, the Corporate Plan progress report 2023-24 is evidence that despite the additional unprecedented pressures, there has been good progress in delivering the Corporate Plan objectives.

Financial austerity and the reduced capacity of staff who are taking on more roles as staff are not replaced remains a significant barrier. We continue to deliver budget cuts to ensure we can balance the budget but this becomes more challenging every year, and as a result extremely difficult decisions have had to be taken to increase charges or reduce or stop some service provision.

We continue to explore and take advantage of other funding opportunities which have become available. We have secured £20m from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to strengthen community regeneration, support local business growth and support adults to develop their skills for employment. However this fund will cease in 2025. In addition we continue look how we can transform services in order to streamline business process, and the use of technology to increase capacity.

Whilst we have an oversight of and attend all regional strategic partnerships, it is a complex landscape and careful management is needed to ensure that boards do not duplicate or conflict.

3. Is governance supporting the delivery of objectives?

- The Authority continues to review internal controls and make changes as required by legislation. Internal Audit regularly review their assurance map which is used to inform the Internal Audit plan.
- The Governance and Audit Committee completes an annual self-assessment of its performance to demonstrate it is discharging its responsibilities and its arrangements are effective. A corrective action plan is produced where areas for improvement are identified.
- The Head of Audit & Procurement Service and the Audit Manager meet regularly with service management teams to discuss their latest risks, concerns and requirements. This ensures that Internal Audit are up to date and aware of emerging issues and risks and will be able to focus resources in the greatest areas of priority and risk at the time.
- There are twice yearly performance reports to democracy and senior management and all managers can access performance data through CAMMS at any time.
- The corporate risk and issue registers are aligned to the wellbeing objectives and there are measures and method statements in place to support each corporate action.
- There are routes for both the public and staff to feedback their views through community engagement exercises, e-petitions, staff appraisals and the staff suggestions portal.
- There are feedback mechanisms in place through the social media, staff brief, staff engagement events, social media, and managers' forum.
- All projects and programmes have benefits realisation plans in place and keep lessons learned logs which are shared through the Programme and Project Management Forum.
- There has been an ongoing programme of modernisation across the whole Authority to ensure that we meet the highly ambitious budget reductions and ensure that we are as efficient as possible. The Workwise Project continued our modernisation work and renewal post-pandemic.

- A review of our main office estate has been completed and approval of the outline business case has been approved to consider in more detail a full business case for a 1 office solution at Coed Pella.

4. What do we do well?

- There are clearly defined functions and roles to facilitate members and officers working together to achieve a common purpose, and to determine the interventions necessary to meet the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and the corporate outcomes. A comprehensive induction plan is in place to ensure that all newly elected members are supported to understand their roles and responsibilities and how the council works – particularly in relation to governance.
- A comprehensive induction plan is also in place for new senior managers to ensure they have the knowledge and support they need to perform their role effectively, contributing to the effective governance of the organisation.
- As well as Corporate Inductions, the ‘onboarding’ page helps to induct all new members of staff and provides a source of reference for them to refer to as they develop in their new role.
- All corporate priorities and corporate risks and issues are assigned to senior managers and cabinet members in order that they can be held to account for the effectiveness of implementation.
- There are robust arrangements for effective financial control through the Authority’s accounting procedures and financial regulations. These include established budget planning procedures, which are subject to risk assessment, and regular reports to members comparing forecasts of revenue and capital expenditure to annual budgets and a business planning framework process that supports the Authority’s resource allocation process.
- Despite 16 years of austerity, the Authority has a good track record of managing its spending plans within the approved budget. Successive annual improvement reports produced by Audit Wales have concluded that there is good internal control.

Despite the barriers and challenges identified, the Authority has delivered a number of achievements against its wellbeing objectives.

Outcome 1 – People in Conwy value and look after the environment

1. Continued to deliver coastal and flood defence schemes county-wide to protect communities from flooding and adapt to the effects of climate change.
2. Continued to improve active travel routes with the development of 9 new active travel schemes county-wide, including: Craig y Don; Glan Conwy RSPB link; Conwy bridge; Betws y Coed to Llanrwst; construction of Dolgarrog Bridge; Towyn to Kinmel Bay; Marl Lane in Llandudno Junction; the Toll Bar roundabout in Penrhyn Bay; and Colwyn Bay.
3. Installed e-bike chargers and repair stations at various locations along National Cycle Route 5 (NCN5) in the county.
4. Installed 18 electric vehicle charging stations in 2 of our depots, including some hybrid-powered charging stations, to support an electric fleet. 4 electric recycling vehicles are already in front line service.
5. Collected 12 tonnes (750k) coffee pods from households as part of the kerbside ‘Podback collection scheme’, since its launch in September 2022.
6. Established a contract with Denbighshire County Council to enable residents of Conwy and Denbighshire to use all of the household waste recycling centres in both counties.
7. Achieved a recycling rate of 71% (19.5k tonnes) of waste reused, recycled and composted, which is an improvement from the previous mid-year period.

8. Achieved street cleanliness of 98%.
9. Obtained support from the North Wales Economic Ambition Board Energy Team to help progress the Local Area Energy Plan and other net zero projects.
10. Integrated supply chain decarbonisation into the aims of the CCBC procurement strategy.

Outcome 2 – People in Conwy live in a county which has a prosperous economy with culture at its heart

11. As a result of the cultural activities taking place and using libraries as community hubs, increased the number of visits to our libraries. The Summer Reading Challenge saw more than 1,100 children taking part and ‘Snac a Stori’ sessions offered a free snack and drink to 600 children.
12. Provided advice and support to 658 businesses, including financial support to 18 businesses through the Conwy business support grant.
13. Secured £20m from the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) to strengthen community regeneration, support local business growth and support adults to develop their skills for employment.
14. Begun work to regenerate key sites, including the old Marks and Spencer building in Llandudno, Colwyn Bay Library and Theatr Colwyn.
15. Upgraded 7 sites with superfast broadband as part of the WG Local Full Fibre Networks programme, including 2 community councils, Cerrigydrudion Library and Gofer bulking station in Abergele.
16. Begun work to make it easier for telecoms providers to utilise our infrastructure such as streetlights or CCTV columns to extend and improve mobile and/or broadband coverage through set up of ‘Open Access Agreements’.
17. Secured funding to deliver a project to improve and futureproof the visitor economy, including a focus on promoting winter tourism and developing the night time economy.
18. Secured funding to refurbish the Colonnades in Llandudno, with a view to providing additional event space, helping to improve the evening economy.
19. Secured more than £1m to support a range of cultural and wellbeing projects as part of the Creu Conwy Culture Strategy. Delivery of our strategy has engaged with more than 5,000 people across a range of festivals, events and workshops.
20. Sold more than 100,000 tickets in our theatres and had 10 sell out performances, including securing Jack Whitehall at Venue Cymru as the only theatre on an exclusive arenas tour for 2 sell out performances.
21. Hosted a range of events delivering economic benefits, including: Prom Xtra, reaching 8,000 people and supporting the Pride Event; a medical conference for BASHH with 600 delegates and an estimated local economic benefit of £500,000.

Outcome 3 – People in Conwy are educated and skilled

22. Received a positive Estyn inspection, retaining our strong Estyn inspection profile.
23. Held webinars for school leaders on curriculum design, assessment and progression and planning principles, increasing their confidence to develop their high level curriculum design.
24. Held a GwE Marketplace event where primary and secondary schools shared successful practice in their curriculum design and planning.
25. Supported all schools to remain on track to realise the steps outlined in the Journey to 2022 (Curriculum for Wales) guide.
26. Delivered attendance guidance and support for schools in managing attendance, to help manage the issue of declining attendance, which remains a national issue.
27. Remained on track to transition all ALN (Additional Learning Needs) pupils for whom the LA has responsibility to the (ALN) system for this academic year.

28. Commenced phase one of the statutory ALN review and developed a 3 year rolling programme.
29. Ran events for 16 to 24 year olds to develop employment skills, including: interview techniques and writing CV's; a 10-week outdoor activity pathway in partnership with Ffit Conwy, providing a taster of careers in the activity sector; and a passport to construction course.
30. Held monthly recruitment events with Job Centre Plus, inviting unemployed people to meet with prospective employers. This has improved links with local employers making them more receptive to accepting more people on work trials.
31. Developed an agreement with Crest Cooperative to offer voluntary placements to people enrolled on Communities for Work Plus.
32. Used our outdoor education centres to provide wellbeing and social interaction activities for vulnerable learners and their families, including those learners who are home educated.
33. Delivered young people wellbeing drop-in sessions in our Family Centres, including mindfulness and smoking cessation sessions.
34. Delivered 30 community open access youth provisions per week, providing young people with spaces to socialise and gain life skills.

Outcome 4 – People in Conwy have access to affordable, appropriate good quality accommodation that enhances the quality of their lives

35. Since April 2023, delivered 122 units of affordable housing via the social housing grant programme.
36. Adapted 61 properties enabling 61 additional vulnerable residents to live independently in their own homes.
37. Brought 48 empty properties back into use, 8 of which were brought back into use as affordable housing and acquired 2 long term empty properties through the Leasing Scheme Wales.
38. Negotiated £1.2m from Section 106 funding to ensure school capacity is factored into new housing developments.
39. Secured £4.4m from the WG TACP (Transitional Accommodation Capital Programme) to fund the acquisition and refurbishment of 63 accommodation units.
40. Established the Council owned sites project group to increase the supply of affordable housing using Council-owned land.
41. Prevented 82% of homelessness cases, which is an improvement from year-end 2022-23 where 68% of homelessness cases were prevented.
42. Opened phase 1 of Bwthyn y Ddol children's assessment centre with phase 2 in construction.
43. Commenced construction of the Sylva Gardens project, which will provide specialist supported accommodation and a home for life, for young people with learning disabilities and complex needs.

Outcome 5 – People in Conwy are safe and feel safe

44. Delivered sessions in schools educating young people on the issues and risks of knife crime.
45. Reviewed the safeguarding audit toolkit for schools strengthening the process for ensuring safeguarding arrangements are fully compliant with Welsh Government and Estyn requirements.
46. Secured £535,000 funding to enhance the CCTV service as part of better open spaces management, including mobile CCTV.
47. Conducted 105 monitoring visits to care settings, and supported 5 providers through the Escalating Concerns route, in order to improve and maintain high care standards for vulnerable residents.

Outcome 6 – People in Conwy are healthy

48. Served 4,678 free school meals per day in our primary schools.
49. Appointed a Wellbeing Officer: Arts and Culture, who is working closely with the Family Centres, Disabilities and the Mental Wellness Team to explore opportunities for early prevention and intervention through Culture.
50. Delivered a series of £1 cinema screenings at Theatr Colwyn, providing affordable access to entertainment for families during the cost of living crisis.
51. Offered reminiscence sessions in the dementia ward at Colwyn Bay Hospital through the Fusion project.
52. Participated in the WG Dementia Listening Campaign, supporting the Llanfairfechan community to become more dementia friendly.
53. Employed an Employment Pathway Coordinator to enable more people with a learning disability to gain paid employment.
54. Continued the roll out of the new commissioning model for delivering domiciliary care for older people in Colwyn Bay and Abergele, involving service users in rightsizing their care packages, which is having a positive impact on the quality of care provided.
55. Secured £760,000 grant funding for the Bron y Nant Work Opportunities project to help people with learning disabilities develop skills to obtain paid employment.
56. Achieved 97% of care leavers with a pathway plan v's target of 95%.
57. Through our Family Centres, delivered MIND Mums Matter sessions, drop-ins for autism, sensory play sessions for children with additional needs and young carers' groups.
58. Increased fees for foster carers through the Eliminating Profit grant as one mechanism to increase the availability of foster carers in the county.
59. Delivered our Community Wellbeing Programme, including walking groups to encourage being active and a dancing programme for people living with Parkinson's disease.
60. Continued the Recovery College and delivered the Creating Journaling programme as part of this. This college is helping to provide preventative services that people cannot access elsewhere.
61. Reduced the waiting list for care packages by 66%, from 1800 at year-end 2022-23 to 600 at mid-year 2023-24, through the bundling of care hours.
62. Worked in partnership with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to address the issues relating to doctor surgery capacity and recruitment in Colwyn Bay.
63. Secured funding to improve and increase the gym equipment in our leisure centres to continue to meet the increasing demand for these facilities.
64. Secured funding to improve and increase the provision of high quality swimming facilities to continue to meet the increasing demand for swimming lessons.

Outcome 7 – People in Conwy live in a county where the use of Welsh is thriving and people can participate in all aspects of community life through the medium of Welsh.

65. Delivered 601 Welsh promotion activities, including: weekly bilingual Storytime; one-off events to promote services to the community e.g. with Merched y Wawr; historical societies and school visits and activities in conjunction with the Creu Conwy programme.
66. Continued the Sgwrsio Scheme with 30 pairs of Welsh learners / fluent Welsh speakers meeting regularly to chat in Welsh.
67. Successfully trialled a new format for our Work Welsh courses, combining online learning with face to face lessons.
68. Supported 13 staff to pass their Welsh exams, achieving high pass results.
69. Translated approx. 1.4 million words and provided 50-70 hours of translation for meetings every month during the period.
70. Participated in the Academi Wales project 'Leading in a bilingual country' to further develop our culture of bilingualism.

71. Received praise from the Welsh Language Commissioner for the high level of compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.

Outcome 8 - People in Conwy are informed, included and listened to and can actively contribute to a community where their background and identity are valued and respected

72. Delivered LGBTQ+ heritage sessions within our Museums service.
73. Through the Amdani project, recruited volunteers with lived experience of disability, to explore the history of disability in Conwy.
74. Worked in partnership with Disability Arts Cymru and Mentor Iaith on the 'Nothing about us without us project' to ensure we reach the lesser heard communities in Conwy.
75. Developed our draft Strategic Equality Plan 2024-2028 (now called Inclusive Conwy Strategy), incorporating actions from the Anti-racist Wales action plan and LGBTQ+ action plan.
76. Delivered 2 workshops and ran a survey as part of the Empowering Diverse Communities into Employment project, to support access to employment for minority groups.
77. Delivered anti-racism awareness sessions for senior and middle managers.
78. Consulted with the public on our budget for 2024/25, asking people for their views on how we prioritise our resources.
79. Developed a 2-year Communications Strategy to help better inform and communicate with the residents of Conwy, also increasing our focus on sharing good news and positive progress.
80. Delivered digital accessibility training. Sessions have been well attended and well received.
81. Drawn up Kickstarter place plans for Llanfairfechan, Penmaenmawr, Conwy and Llanrwst which include a community identified list of priorities.
82. Supported Bay of Colwyn Town Council to draw down WG funding to assist with finalising their place plan.
83. Developed a 5-year Member Development Strategy and supporting training and appraisal programme.
84. Developed a Public Participation Strategy.
85. Maintained high levels of Member attendance at committee meetings, which has increased from the previous period, helped by the offer of multi-location meetings.
86. Delivered report writing and democratic meeting learning events for staff to improve their knowledge and understanding of democratic processes. These events were well received and there is currently a waiting list for future sessions.
87. Reviewed the Constitution and aligned it to the All Wales Model Constitution.
88. Surveyed all polling stations to assess the level of compliance with accessibility requirements.
89. Undertook a review of polling districts and polling places to make sure all electors have reasonable facilities for voting.
90. Sent birthday cards to 14, 16 and 18 year olds to raise their awareness of the democracy and election processes and encouraging them to participate.

Outcome 9 – CCBC is resilient

91. Continued to administer a number of Welsh Government grants for our residents and businesses, including:
 - i. 740 discretionary housing grant payments totalling £138,000;
 - ii. £127,000 to the County's food banks;
 - iii. 604 energy bill support scheme payments totalling £192,000 to help people with rising energy costs.
92. Implemented a new core financial system, Technology One.

93. Continued the use of robotic process automation to digitise and automate working practices and reduce manual inputting of information.
94. Secured £60,000 funding to expand the LoRaWAN solution across the county. Improvements include: provision of river level monitors; soil moisture sensors to protect trees; and fridge and freezer monitors in schools to automate temperature checks.
95. Delivered training to strengthen workforce resilience, including: post trauma training for staff working on the highway and in housing resettlement; workforce planning; developing personal resilience; and media training for our Senior Management Team.
96. Made further improvements to our recruitment processes, including: digitising the vacancy control process to make it more efficient; reviewing the web pages and information, setting up a job alert process, piloted a reviewed job description template; and developed a suite of standard interview questions to enable more effective interviews.
97. Increased the number of online payments made by customers.

What could we do better? What do we need to keep a focus on?

1. Regularly reviewing our budget position, service delivery and business processes to meet the increase in costs and reduction in funding so that despite the challenges, we reach a balanced budget (corporate risk CR1.9.4).
2. Maintaining our fleet of vehicles to effectively underpin and sustain service delivery.
3. Improving the sustainability of the social care sector in the face of increasing demand, more complex cases, and recruitment and economic challenges (corporate issues - CI15 and CI19).
4. Improving the social care accommodation options for children and young people in Conwy, reducing the need for out of county residential placements.
5. Addressing the continued significant demand on housing and homelessness services (corporate issues - CI17 and CI18 and corporate risk - CR1.4.1).
6. Improving our partnership working with the health service with a greater focus on prevention (corporate issue – CI21).
7. Managing the impacts from increased storm events on our infrastructure and resources (corporate risk CR1.1.1).
8. Managing our physical infrastructure to ensure it is safe, sustainable and climate resilient (corporate risks – CR1.1.1 and CR1.1.3).
9. Mitigating and adapting to the effects of Climate Change and working towards our net carbon zero target (corporate risk CR1.1.4).
10. Updating our Asset Management Plan to maintain a strategic approach to the management of our assets (corporate risk - CR1.9.16).
11. Improving our approach to recruitment and retention to ensure a sustainable workforce (corporate Issue CI13).
12. Managing the impact of the cost of living crisis on our ability to efficiently recover outstanding debts to the Council.
13. Improving our completion of safeguarding training for new staff by identifying and removing barriers to training completion, especially for casual and transient employees (corporate risk CR1.5.2).
14. Improving our cyber resilience and service continuity in light of increased digital demand and external cyber threats, such as the war in Ukraine (corporate risk CR1.9.12).
15. Securing a solution to preserve digital documents in the longer term. (corporate risk CR1.9.2).
16. Improving school attendance post-pandemic which currently stands at 89% but is above the national average.
17. Monitoring the impact of our hybrid working model on service quality, team culture and staff wellbeing (corporate risk CR1.9.1).
18. Continuing to maximise opportunities for our staff to learn and use Welsh and for children and young people to access Welsh through their education.

6 Governance Issues

We have been advised on the implications of the result of the **review of the effectiveness of the governance framework** by the Governance & Audit Committee, Principal Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet and that the arrangements **continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework**. The areas to be specifically addressed with new actions planned are outlined below.

There are no significant governance issues, but we are via our governance procedures aware of and managing our risks and issues but after a process of self-evaluation to review our effectiveness, we have identified the following actions:

- A1 Review Outcome 9 of the Corporate Plan to build short, medium and longer term resilience.
- A2 Further develop medium term financial planning, seeking to maximise on the benefit of extending our Medium Term Financial Plan beyond two years, and identifying actions to build financial resilience.
- A3 Review the approach to procurement to increase capacity and improve coordination of procurement activities.
- A4 Streamline decision-making processes to remove bureaucratic barriers and improve the timeliness of decisions, maximising their effectiveness.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We will merge this action plan with the actions identified in the performance self-assessment to form one action plan.

Our corporate governance arrangements have continued to be effective in supporting the Council to adapt and deliver services without any continuity issues. We will ensure that this sound approach to governance continues in 2024-2025 and in future years as we continue to meet our challenges. Our governance arrangements have worked well to adjust to the immense pressures, and in these turbulent times we cannot yet say what the long term impacts will be for public finance and public services, the change could be profound but also provide new opportunities, and we need to continue to ensure that our Governance Framework is fit for purpose.

Conclusion

The Authority has access to sound information on which to base decisions which are made in a transparent manner through public documented meetings. Governance arrangements have effectively supported the authority through a continued challenging period. Through member induction all elected members have been made aware of their constitutional responsibilities. Decisions are subject to effective external and internal scrutiny and where weaknesses are found, action plans are promptly put in place and monitored. Based on this self-assessment, the overall conclusion is that our governance arrangements for the period 2023/2024 were fit for purpose and effectively supported the delivery of our objectives.

Signed 

Date July 22, 2024

Rhun ap Gareth
Chief Executive

Signed 

Date July 22, 2024

Councillor Charlie McCoubrey
Leader of the Council