

# Executive Summary: Performance Self-Assessment, April 2023 to March 2024

Together with our performance report for 2023 to 2024, this document makes up our Self-Assessment under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. It is an accessible end-of-year summary of our performance against key functions, specifically our Well-Being Objectives (which are our Corporate Plan Priorities) and the seven governance areas. Evidence behind our conclusions in this document may be found in the accompanying performance report.

**Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is available in Welsh. We are also happy to provide this document in large print, audio and braille, please contact the Corporate Improvement and Development Team.**



**Conwy - Sir flaengar sy'n creu cyfleoedd**

**Conwy - a progressive County creating opportunity**

## Contact details and more information

We want to hear whether you think our priorities are the right ones for your community, and how you think we are performing against them. For more information, or to let us know what you think about anything in this report, contact us:

**By email:** [CIDT@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:CIDT@conwy.gov.uk)

**By telephone:** 01492 57 4000

Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg. We welcome telephone calls in Welsh.

BT Relay Service Customers with hearing or speech impairments can contact any Council service by dialling **18001** before the number they require

### By Sign

British Sign Language users can contact us using a Sign Language interpreter through the [InterpretersLive! service](#), provided by Sign Solutions.

### By post:

Performance and Improvement Team  
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PO Box 1  
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We welcome correspondence in Welsh. There will be no delay in responding to correspondence received in Welsh.

### To keep up-to-date:

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Visit our [‘Have your Say’](#) webpage

## **We want to hear Young People's views!**

Having a say isn't just for adults. Young people are the future and we want to hear their views too!

There are lots of ways you as a young person can have your say in Conwy. All of the services working with children and young people in Conwy give opportunities for you to have your say. In particular, Conwy Youth Council are about having a voice and having a choice in decisions that affect young people. They are your representatives and have a say on things that can make a difference to children and young people in Conwy.

If you want to get involved, visit the [Youth Council Facebook page](#), or go to our [Youth Service website](#), or contact us:

**By email:** [youthservice@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:youthservice@conwy.gov.uk)

**By telephone:** 01492 575100

Rydym yn croesawu galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg. We welcome telephone calls in Welsh.

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**Through Facebook, X (Twitter) and Instagram:** @GIconwyYS

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## **Our Approach to Self-Assessment**

We hope that you find in this document and the accompanying performance report a renewed approach to our performance reporting, which has been designed to better meet accessibility standards. In addition to our usual data and activity updates, they include trend analysis and a comprehensive, but hopefully digestible and balanced summary of key news stories, and activity undertaken by our principle committees (Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, and Governance and Audit). We have also included reports undertaken by our regulators.

This Executive Summary provides a critical overview of the evidence amassed in our main performance report, and seeks to convey the extent to which our performance is driving positive outcomes and how well our governance is supporting continuous improvement. The summary also looks ahead to key opportunities and challenges. The two reports combined respond to the performance requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and presents a clear picture of the overall 'corporate health' of the organisation.

Going forward, it is intended that our performance report will be updated on a six-monthly basis, covering April to September, and October to March, being again summarised once annually. The performance reports will continue to catalogue progress against not only our key Corporate Plan activity, but also any identified improvement activity arising from the reports (as required under the act), and any actions agreed in response to regulatory or peer challenge activity. The reports are also a vehicle for capturing improvement themes arising from our Service Performance Review process, which again is an important cog in our performance management framework that ensures that we are an organisation that self-assesses on an ongoing basis.

## **Overall, How Well Are We Doing?**

It must be emphasised that this past year has, as it has for the public sector as a whole, been the most financially challenging for us as a council, with members and officers having to make very difficult decisions to ensure that we delivered a balanced budget in 2023 to 2024, which included £11.6m budget savings. In-year demand for services continued to grow and we incurred unforeseen costs as a consequence of Storm Babet. As a result, our spend exceeded our income by £1.4m, which was funded from our reserves. The

challenge ahead will be no less difficult and we are not complacent about how hard it will be.

Below summarises our performance and governance across the year into some general observations about our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

1. Overall, we have done a great deal of good work in support of our corporate priorities. We have responded responsibly to the financial pressures that all local authorities are facing, and have used our resources economically, efficiently, and effectively. Our governance processes are comprehensive; and we have refocussed capacity at the senior leadership level, changes to which are working well.
2. We have demonstrated a clear commitment to the environment, working to tackle our carbon footprint and the nature emergency. We have worked with communities on a number of important projects that demonstrates us championing a respect of nature, whilst also supporting well-being. We recognise, however, that there is still work to do to get to net zero by 2030.
3. We have attracted some £42.6 million in external funding to support regeneration, arts and heritage, businesses and communities, delivering a number of important transformative projects in partnership with the Welsh and UK governments. We also delivered, with UK Government funding, a number of key projects that promote adult numeracy, physical well-being, and offer employability support and improved community facilities.
4. Our Youth Service work has been nationally recognised for its excellence; and we rolled out the Welsh Government's free school meals programme to all primary schools seven months ahead of schedule.
5. We have strengthened our structures in support of housing and have a strong record of delivery in terms of providing affordable homes and bringing empty properties back into use. We have also made improvements in the prevention of homelessness, although recognise continuing pressures in this area.
6. We have worked well with partners to keep our communities safe, and safeguarding is very clearly a strong priority in our organisation. In particular we are delivering on exciting and really significant transformative work in the area of children's care. We still face significant challenges in the wake of the pandemic and cost of living crisis of course, particularly within Social Care and Education. We will continue with our transformation programme and explore collaborative opportunities where appropriate with our partners to maximise resources to address these issues.

7. There is a strong culture and ethos within our organisation that supports the learning of Welsh, and to build the confidence of existing Welsh speaking staff to use Welsh in the workplace. We also have a clear plan to support Welsh in education settings and are seeing encouraging increases in the number of pupils accessing Welsh-medium education.
8. There are examples of good public engagement across the organisation, particularly around the budget, and we will continue to consider the way in which we consistently conduct effective and meaningful involvement exercises with stakeholders. We acknowledge in our engagement strategy the importance of meeting people on their terms, not ours.
9. Our [Inclusive Conwy Plan](#) is an important step to achieving greater equity, diversity and inclusion within our organisation and the county. Through this plan we aim to embed a culture of awareness and individual responsibility amongst staff, that no matter your background or experience, we all have a collective responsibility to promote equity, diversity and inclusion.
10. We do good work in support of staff development, hybrid ways of working, and well-being, which is more important than ever during the present difficult times. We will continue to ensure that our staff are well-supported and listened to throughout the organisation. We still face recruitment difficulties, not helped by spending reductions in some areas. For some professions, however, the review of processes, brand, and advertising methods has seen some improvement in recruitment.
11. We have demonstrated that we are proactive in our management of key assets, including through transfer or disposal. Our response to the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete issue in particular is also to be commended. However, financial constraints are going to negatively impact on our ability to maintain our assets and invest in the future. We must also ensure that we meet certain new legislative requirements over this next year (particularly around social partnership working and procurement), which will again be difficult in the face of reducing resources.
12. We are reviewing whether existing systems and processes are appropriate and proportionate to the present needs of the organisation. Whilst reduced capacity as the workforce shrinks is a major issue, there are growing opportunities to consider new transformational ways of working, reducing bureaucracy, working in partnership, and harnessing emerging technologies. We will continue to strive to be agile in recognising and resolving barriers to progress; and ensure we remain resilient as our capacity reduces.

13. Arising from this report, we have identified some key improvements to make over the next year to our Performance and Risk Management frameworks, supporting a revised Corporate Plan that delivers resilience in the face of financial challenges.

## **Performance Objectives: Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027**

### **1. An environment that is valued and looked after**

We deliver great work in support of the Environment, having been recognised by Audit Wales for having a clear vision and strategic support in place to help it achieve net carbon zero goals. We have also committed to tackling the Nature Emergency and have in this last period approved our [Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Delivery Plan for 2023 to 2026](#). All Corporate Plan activity is currently progressing with no concerns, and key measures provide a positive picture. We have delivered a number of important community projects that have demonstrated respect and due regard for nature, and we will continue to champion the cause for nurturing and preserving our important natural assets, working with key partners in the region to help maximise any resources available to help tackle the scale of the problem. We will also continue to champion the Well-being benefits that come with access to a clean, attractive environment, continuing its good work to further active travel, for example. In terms of achieving net carbon zero, the challenge will be in maintaining our pace of improvement as ‘quick wins’ and financial resources are exhausted.

### **2. A prosperous economy with culture at its heart**

We do a great deal in support of local businesses and the economy, providing not only business advice and support, but also help through various grant schemes. We have attracted some £42.6 million in external funding to support regeneration, arts and heritage, businesses and communities. Good work is also carried out to help people into work through the activities of our Employment Hub, and the successful Job Expo event that attracted over 1000 people and some 90 organisations. We have supported a great many important projects to help regenerate communities, and will continue to work closely with key partners such as the UK Government and the North Wales Growth Deal to ensure that future benefits are realised in Conwy. Our approach to tourism and supporting local cultural events is also to our credit, having a clear Destination Management Plan in place, alongside our ‘Creu Conwy’ strategy. However, the greatest challenge remains – finding adequate funding to support our aspirations.



### **3. Education and skills**

We were pleased to receive a positive report from Estyn praising our work to support school staff and improve the quality of teaching and leadership in schools. Youth Services were also recognised for providing beneficial activities for young people (the team having also recently received the gold Quality Mark for Youth Work in Wales). Despite challenging circumstances, we have made excellent progress with our activity in support of Education and Skills over the last year, including the delivery of UK Government funded projects that promote adult numeracy, physical well-being, and offer employability support and improved community facilities. Our School Catering Team has also received numerous awards in recognition of their good work to support healthy eating, complementing the good work taking place in schools to understand pupil well-being. However, there remains in the wake of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis significant challenges that are impacting on young people and available support. Attendance is one particular area where there continues to be a great deal of concern nationally, and we are working closely with schools to ensure robust attendance procedures are being applied. The percentage of school leavers known not to be in education, employment or training also remains an important area of focus for us. We can anticipate that rising inflationary costs will put pressure on our Sustainable Communities for Learning programme in the future. A risk also arose following the Welsh Government's announcement in January 2024 about the future of school improvement consortia in Wales; however, we have a clear plan in place. We will continue to work with our school improvement partners to ensure that strong arrangements to monitor and improve school standards remain in place.

### **4. Affordable, appropriate, good quality accommodation**

We have done good work to progress our housing strategy, including having clear governance arrangements in place, and not least creating a distinct housing service and recruiting a senior post to oversee and give focus to this important area of work. The focus of our efforts on providing affordable homes and bringing empty properties back in to use is to be commended, and we have been especially decisive in our approach to second homes in the county. There has also been a clear improvement in the prevention of homelessness; however, there of course remains a considerable challenge in this area with high and increasing demand. So too there remain challenges in the care sector, which is unstable and costly. We will continue to work with our partners, and where possible

explore new partnership opportunities, to further strengthen our work in both these important areas.

## **5. Safe and feeling safe**

We continue to make solid and steady progress with this priority, particularly with regards to rolling-out important safeguarding and cyber essentials training amongst staff. We are also progressing a number of key projects to improve the quality of care provision, many of which are being carried out in collaboration with partners. We have done good work to foster community cohesion and ensure our communities are safe and feel safe, and we will ensure this work continues amongst continuing crime and anti-social behavioural pressures. Decreasing resources emphasises the need to continue to work with regional partners, such as the police and community safety colleagues, wherever possible. We have put in considerable effort as an organisation to raising awareness of cyber security threats and safe online use. We will continue to prioritise our efforts in this important area to safeguard our IT systems.

## **6. Healthy**

The work undertaken by our services in support of this priority is broad and varied, with some significant developments happening in the last year. We have continued to make important strategic investment decisions to improve key leisure, sports and social care facilities and services. We have seen an increased uptake in the use of our leisure facilities and fitness memberships. We have done good work to make services more inclusive, and to help alleviate poverty and support those at a socio-economic disadvantage. The most significant programme of work ahead will be the transformation children's care experiences, especially those in high cost placements. Feedback from our customers and regulators is largely positive, and where improvements have been identified, we will take forward our action plans to address these issues. We continue to make considered efforts to make sure that our services are as efficient as possible; however, this can come at a cost to quality as resources diminish. Increasing care needs and the cost of care are of course the biggest challenges facing us as a council. Neither has the impact of the cost of living crisis gone away. We will continue to work closely with our partners to help address these significant challenges where we can.

## **7. Thriving Welsh Language**

We have done good work during 2023 to 2024 to promote the Welsh language and support pupils, schools and staff to develop their skills and learn the language, also building the confidence and skills of existing Welsh speakers. In particular we have introduced a number of innovative initiatives to support staff learning, which have a strong take-up. However, there is still a great deal of work needed to meet targets set within our Welsh in Education Strategic Plan and achieving the national target of 1 million Welsh Speakers by 2050; and to further increase the proficiency of Welsh within our own workforce, helping to meet the Welsh Government's Mwy Na Geiriau – More than Just Words framework, which ensures that Welsh speakers receive health and social care services in their own language.

## **8. Informed, included, listened to, and involved in the community**

We have progressed really important work in the area of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion during 2024 to 2025. In addition to adopting the Anti-Racism Charter, Council approved its Inclusive Conwy Plan for 2024 to 2028, which aims to embed a collective responsibility amongst staff to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. We have also signed up to the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate campaign, which emphasises the importance of remaining respectful of others and having no tolerance for abuse. Further supporting democracy, we have reviewed polling districts, adopted our Multi-Location Meeting Policy, Webcasting Protocol and Best Practice Guidance, and accepted amendments to our Petition Scheme. We have undertaken work to support volunteering opportunities in communities; and have sought the involvement of key stakeholders – including residents, partners and businesses – on key policy areas that have an impact on the public, such as on our budget, library opening hours, the public toilet strategy, and the Local Development Plan. We will continue to grow the good work that we do with engagement, as there of course remain significant challenges, not least in terms of resources, but also with conducting effective and meaningful involvement approaches across our business; and likewise with proactively involving and championing the rights of individuals from all backgrounds.

## **9. Resilient council**

During 2023 to 2024, we have continued to deliver on projects to support staff well-being, as well as support their personal and professional development. The updated digitised

Conwy Conversation will be rolled out during 2024 to 2025, which it is hoped will improve our approach to staff one-to-one meetings with line managers. Our Workwise Framework ensures that we maximise on the most beneficial ways of work. We are, however, entering our most financially challenging period, and our future resilience will depend entirely on the level of government funding and our ability to make difficult decisions over the coming months and years to guarantee our ongoing sustainability. The continuing involvement of, and clear messaging to the public and staff throughout this will be vital, being particularly mindful of well-being, also at a time when recruitment and retention challenges are still with us in some key service areas.

## **10. Governance Functions**

### **10.1. Corporate Planning**

We have robust officer and member structures in place to support strategic planning within the organisation, and we are assured that we meet key legislative requirements under the Well-being of Future Generations Act, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, and the Equality Act 2010 and subsequent 2011 (Wales) Regulations. The Chief Executive has continued with the recruitment to, and reconfiguration of key posts within the leadership structure, improving resilience at the senior level. Our Annual Governance Statement concurred that there were no significant governance issues, but does highlight concerns about wider resource difficulties, staff capacity and well-being. These issues are well understood, and there is considerable work taking place around these matters, and particularly to make sure that staff are well supported. Responding to the financial challenges facing the authority, we will deliver a clear plan for resilience, utilising technology and transforming delivery where possible. This focus will form the basis of a rationalised Corporate Plan that better meets our budget pressures and releases capacity where possible.

### **10.2. Financial Planning**

The narrative throughout this summary and accompanying Self-Assessment report is very clear with regards to the financial challenges that we are facing. The situation is very serious, and we are working hard to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the council as an organisation. Balancing the budget is an imperative, but putting spend and necessary investment decisions on hold is also creating a growing backlog of issues for us now and in the future, from capacity and resource pressures affecting day-to-day delivery, to a

deteriorating assets portfolio that comes with ever greater risks and missed investment or disposal opportunities. The positive in all this is that we do have strong financial processes in place and a resilience plan. We have worked with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) to rigorously review areas of key spend, as well as looking at business processes and digital solutions to reduce spend. In addition there is clear political oversight. We will continue to apply the utmost rigour in the scrutiny of service budgets during 2024 to 2025 and beyond, and do all that we can to maximise income and external funding streams; explore opportunities for alternative models of service delivery; embrace new technologies and initiatives; and collaborate with partners and community groups (within the county and the region) to both deliver and influence demand on services wherever possible. We will also continue to be mindful of staff well-being at this difficult time, and bring them with us on this challenging journey.

### **10.3. Performance Management**

We have strong performance management arrangements in place covering an array of activity from our Corporate Plan, to programme and project management, the Director's annual social services report, complains and compliments, regulatory work, and the activity of key committees. We have also continued with our twice annual programme of Service Performance Reviews, which is an important part of our processes that allow for ongoing self-assessment. We have demonstrated that we are responsive to committee requests that help strengthen our procedures and have through this Self-Assessment identified further areas for improvement. Following the rationalisation of the Corporate Plan during 2024 to 2025, we will revisit the Plan's performance framework to improve benchmarking and user perspective information. Our performance management framework as a whole will also be revisited to ensure that it is proportionate to the needs of the organisation. This will include a review of the Service Performance Review process.

### **10.4. Risk Management**

We have a mature risk and issues management processes in place with good engagement by officers and members. The corporate risk register houses some 25 risks, 11 of which remain critical risks to the business of the council. The Corporate Issues Log records 12 issues, 11 of which have a high priority rating. These documents, perhaps more than any other, highlight the intensely difficult environment in which we are operating. It is now timely that the Corporate Risk Register and Issues Logs undergo a more comprehensive review with risk and issue owners to rationalise the registers and controls where possible.

Our Risk Management Framework will be reviewed alongside this, with fresh training rolled out to officers and members.

## **10.5. Workforce Planning**

The financial challenges facing us are of course putting, and will continue to put for some time, considerable pressure on our workforce, not helped by further reductions in spend. Neither have the challenges that began with the pandemic in terms of recruitment gone away, there remaining pockets of specialty where it is very difficult to recruit. Staff absence has increased, with stress and anxiety being a major cause and area of concern. However, hospital waiting times are also a factor in being able to safely return staff to work. But we take our duty of care over staff very seriously and have a number of measures in place to support staff health and well-being. Both the Workwise and new Hybrid Working Policy will help 40% of our workforce work in a more flexible and remote way. We have published our pay statement and reviewed our job evaluation policy to ensure we remain compliant with equal pay legislation. We are also now looking forward to rolling out our revised approach to staff one-to-one meetings – Conwy Conversations – which will strengthen our culture and support an environment where employees feel valued and are listened to. We will also continue with the delivery of our Learning and Development Plan, which seeks to not only support personal and professional development, but also support health and well-being. We also have a great deal to do in promoting an Inclusive Conwy culture that promotes individual awareness and responsibility for equity, diversity and inclusion. We will also be looking to meet new requirements under the Social Partnership and Procurement (Wales) Act 2023.

## **10.6. Assets**

During 2023 to 2024 the council has demonstrated that it is proactive in its management of key assets, and is not afraid of making difficult decisions. This is evident through its ambitious office rationalisation strategy, but also through decisions made to dispose, lease, or change the use of property within its portfolio. Our efforts to respond to the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete issue in particular is to be commended. We have revised our Conwy Digital Strategy for 2024 to 2025, and we are assured that robust arrangements continue to be in place around our ICT assets and infrastructure, with a proactive approach to risk management in particular. There will doubtless be harder decisions to make around our assets in the future as we respond to financial challenges.

Every effort will be taken to ensure that the impact of those decisions are assessed and thoroughly understood, and that the principles of involvement are applied throughout.

## 10.7. Procurement

We have effective procurement support and processes in place, and have, with approval in June 2023, a clear strategy in place to ensure that we continue to manage our spend responsibly and secure value for money. Decarbonisation of our supply chain, which makes up the majority of our carbon footprint, is a clear priority within the strategy, as is responsible procurement that adds social value. Significant change is coming to the way in which public sector procurement is undertaken and there are going to be challenges with the implementation of the new legislation, not least because of capacity pressures. Considerably more time and planning will be required to meet notification requirements, for example, before we can procure any works, goods or services, which will necessitate a cultural shift in how procurement is approached by services.

## 11. New Ways of Working Journey Checker

In February 2024, the Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner wrote to public bodies to publicise the release of a Ways of Working Journey Checker to help organisations reflect on their use of the five ways of working; to assess progress with delivering the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; and to provide some helpful prompts for improvement and next steps to focus future work. Public bodies were requested to complete the exercise by September.

The assessment tool has been completed on behalf of the council by the Performance and Improvement Team, applying their knowledge and understanding as to how the organisation works. The assessment asked 63 questions in total, structured around the five ways of working, and covered both **Process** and **People and Culture** within the council. Following completion of the questions, an assessment is made as to the overall progress of our journey within each way of working. The possible outcome of the assessment's results range in ascending improvement from **No Change (1)**, to **Simple Change (2)**, **More Adventurous (3)**, **Owning Ambition (4)**, and finally to **Leading the Way (5)**. To provide some additionally to this Self-Assessment, the results of our assessment has been included below.

## 11.1. Process

Principle	Outcome
Long-term	More Adventurous (3)
Prevention	Owning Ambition (4)
Involvement	Owning Ambition (4)
Collaboration	Owning Ambition (4)
Integration	Owning Ambition (4)

We are very pleased with the above results with regard to council process, which reflects the great deal of work that has been undertaken within the organisation to embed the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the five ways of working within our systems and processes. Further work is needed with our prioritisation and balancing of long-term outcomes and actions alongside short and medium-term needs.

## 11.2. People and Culture

Principle	Outcome
Long-term	More Adventurous (3)
Prevention	Owning Ambition (4)
Involvement	Owning Ambition (4)
Collaboration	More Adventurous (3)
Integration	More Adventurous (3)

On the whole we are pleased with the above results with regard to People and Culture. Again, we acknowledge that more can be done to help us own our long-term ambition. With regards to integration and collaboration, more could be done to share understanding of, and further embed the ethos of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We could also do more to understand our impact on others when designing objectives and to share our work and learning. The importance of good collaboration and seeking new and effective ways of collaborating should also be well understood throughout the organisation.