

Panel Performance Assessment Report and Ceredigion County Council Response

The Council welcomes the Panel Performance Assessment Report and is grateful to the Panel for their work in providing an independent and external perspective of the extent to which the Council is meeting the performance requirements under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The panel considered whether the Council is exercising its functions effectively; is using its resources economically, efficiently and effectively; and that its governance is effective for securing this.

We acknowledge and accept the report, and note the positive overall conclusions that:

- Considering the current high service demands and very challenging financial pressures, Ceredigion County Council is a well-run local authority.
- The Council has clear and effective leadership with strong relationships across the political and officer executive and wider structures and that the Council is delivering its functions effectively in-light of the significant financial, strategic and operational pressures the Council is dealing with on a daily basis.
- The Council has effective governance and reporting arrangements in place but there is an opportunity to further strengthen the relationships between the Council's executive and back bench members in the decision-making processes and priorities the Council will need to take going forward.
- The Council has established and developing areas of innovation including Well Being Centres, ICT, and hybrid working.
- Opportunities for improvement have been identified, which will enhance the arrangements in place, to support effective communication, relationship management and collective ownership of current and future challenges.

The Council also recognises and accepts the areas for improvement identified by the Performance Assessment Panel and accept their recommendations. Both the recommendations and the Council's detailed response and agreed actions are listed in the table that follows the signatures below.

Bryan Davies	Leader	_____	Date
Eifion Evans	Chief Executive	_____	Date

No.	Recommendation	Ceredigion Response
1.	<p>The Council will need to consider how best to consult on potential budget cuts given the narrow timetable for consultation due to the statutory budget setting deadlines.</p>	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>Over recent years the Council has approved an annual budget and has subsequently undertaken specific consultations on each element of the savings proposed, as listed within the final budget. This has meant that every savings proposal is subject to extensive consultation and is taken through the democratic process for a separate final decision. This process has been thorough and has been subject to consultation and scrutiny. This has resulted in most of the budget proposals being approved, but some have been withdrawn, or changes have been made to the proposal prior to final approval.</p> <p>Although reductions in expenditure during 2024-25 were agreed by majority during the budget-setting process, opposition from the public during consultations meant that a small proportion of the proposals were not realised.</p> <p>In view of the consistent opposition from the public to consultations on service cuts in 2024/25, no new cuts to service were proposed for 2025/26, with the Cabinet and Council deciding that the shortfall in funding would be met by an increase in Council tax.</p> <p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively consider undertaking an overall corporate consultation prior to the approval of the 2026/27 budget.
2.	<p>Council has, to date, been able to provide significant additional funding for the provision of social care, and it will need to consider how sustainable this is going forward given the financial pressures.</p>	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>The Medium-Term Financial Strategy recognises the challenges posed by the increasing demands on social care and has been able to adjust and accommodate additional spending on the most vulnerable citizens in Ceredigion. The spend is monitored closely and there is growing evidence that the rate of expansion is slowing, due to improved monitoring of budgets and management of demand. Nevertheless, it is impossible to accurately predict how many clients will present in any year, nor the breadth of their complexity. The strategic focus is to prevent entry to long term</p>

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		<p>statutory care and cost escalation (step down, prevention and community solutions). Additionally, national schemes such as Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children require flexible responses.</p> <p>Despite serious and ongoing challenges, it is worth noting that since the assessment the Council has carefully transferred residents from an outdated residential home to a modern facility to rationalise care and improve the care experience for residents. Along with the recent replacement of outdated software, these initiatives demonstrate that the Through Age model in Ceredigion is improving services whilst managing expenditure.</p> <p>The Council has introduced Business Analyst posts to the Through-Age and Wellbeing (TAW) staffing structure to closely monitor the efficiency of the TAW model of service provision, increasingly ensuring that investment in prevention and early intervention is indeed slowing down the number and rate of people escalating towards costly care packages.</p> <p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish county-based staffed homes for looked after children. • Reduce reliance on agency workers where it is safe to do so.
3.	<p>The Council should consider the opportunities for further partnership working.</p>	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>As recognised in the Panel Performance Assessment Report, the Council has good working relationships with neighbouring Local Authorities. It also participates in effective partnership and collaboration arrangements with other Public, Third and Private Sector Organisations across the County and Region. The Council works within a complicated regional landscape in that most Health and Social Care and Public Services Board related partnerships and collaborations are based on the Hywel Dda footprint; Economic Development, Planning, Education and Transport are based on the Mid Wales area; whilst Local Resilience and Community Safety Partnership work is based on a Dyfed-Powys region. The council also reviews all collaboration projects on a regular cycle.</p>

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		<p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore new and innovative ways to deliver services with all partners, including the pursuit of further opportunities for service provision and shared functions and facilities with partners.
4.	<p>There is an urgent need for the Council to revisit whether their current strategy for social work recruitment is effective and to explore alternatives.</p>	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>The Council has a robust “grow your own” strategy for social workers, which has been in place since 2023. It is projected that this programme will meet the succession planning needs into the medium and longer term. Please note that three Trainee Social Workers graduated in 2023 and again in 2024. A further six are scheduled to graduate this year, followed by another six next year and three in 2027.</p> <p>A vacancy and recruitment monitoring process has been implemented which reports to senior management monthly. This process focusses on reducing reliance on agency social workers through permanent appointments.</p> <p>The Council has previously piloted recruiting qualified social workers from overseas but following an evaluation it will not be continuing with this option.</p> <p>Discussions continue with Aberystwyth University on the possible introduction of an MSc in Social Work. This would prove beneficial if implemented but does not form part of the Council’s current strategy.</p> <p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver and invest in the “grow your own” strategy for social workers, with the achievable aim of 21 individuals qualifying as social workers over the next 4 years.
5.	<p>The Council should consider how to address a recurring theme of ineffective communication</p>	<p>We recognise these challenges considering significant negative local press and have been actively working to improve external communication. A Corporate e-newsletter and an engagement e-newsletter have been distributed to citizens that have registered to receive them. The number</p>

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	<p>across the authority particularly with partners and residents and the effectiveness of “Clic”.</p>	<p>registered to receive both the Corporate e-newsletter and the engagement e-newsletter are increasing every quarter.</p> <p>Some of the recurring themes identified by the assessment regarding our `CLIC` software relate to historic issues, many of which have been recently resolved or are active projects. However, this is a large area of work which the Council will continue to develop. Clic now sends closure emails to all customer categories, which also contain a unique link to a feedback survey. Integration between some major back-office systems and Clic has been greatly improved. Text Message and bulk email sending tools are being integrated into Clic to allow bulk updates to service users. A My Account platform has also been released, and citizens are being encouraged to adopt which allows them to keep informed with progress, see updates and the status of their enquiry.</p> <p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a Customer Services Strategy which will target improved communication and alternative channels for communication. • Undertake regular analysis of interaction of social media posts, videos and Corporate e-newsletters and use the information to inform future strategies.
6.	<p>There is something of a disconnect between backbench members and the executive/senior leadership teams which need to be addressed.</p>	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>We fully acknowledge the role of backbench members and opposition groups in holding the executive and senior leadership teams to account and their important role in the various Scrutiny Committees. We will continue to work with elected members from across the chamber for the benefit of the residents of Ceredigion. Acknowledging that members will have different opinions and strongly held views on a variety of issues, we will continue to encourage respectful debate but will fully utilise the function of the Monitoring Officer to intervene when appropriate and ensure compliance with the Council’s Code of Conduct.</p>

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		<p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Leader will continue to convene informal meetings with the leaders of the opposition groups to keep them informed of upcoming issues and challenges facing the Council, to engender a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding.
7.	<p>The relationships between scrutiny function and the executive needs to be further developed.</p>	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>It is acknowledged that several of the Members – both Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Members, were newly elected in May 2022 and further training may be required to remind them of their respective roles and responsibilities in the governance structure of the Council.</p> <p>Cabinet has supported several recommendations made by scrutiny. However, it is also recognised that the way in which recommendations made by Scrutiny and are supported by Cabinet are recorded, both in the record of decisions and in the Annual Report, are improved.</p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Forward Work Programmes outline the reason why a matter has been added for future consideration by the respective Committees i.e. Corporate Risk, Corporate Strategy, budget, monitoring, performance etc.</p> <p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide further training to both Overview and Scrutiny Committee members and to Cabinet Members regarding the role of scrutiny and holding the Cabinet Member(s) to account. The training will provide information regarding how to identify and prioritise topics to be scrutinised.
8.	<p>The performance management system is comprehensive but there</p>	<p><u>Response</u></p> <p>The Council’s Performance Team is continuing to support Corporate Lead Officers and Corporate Managers in setting and developing their performance measures. In the last year there has been a drive to include more outcome-based measures in Service Business Plans. Several amendments</p>

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	<p>needs to be more of a focus on outcomes.</p>	<p>have been made to the suite of measures during the 2024/25 year to strengthen them both in terms of general robustness and specifically in measuring outcomes rather than outputs. Furthermore, in preparation for the next round of Business Planning launched in February 2026, the Business Plan presentation to Managers and supporting guidance provided additional information on setting outcome-based measures.</p> <p>All performance measures included in Service Business Plans are linked to one of the Corporate Well-being Objectives which supports the process of monitoring progress against the Objectives.</p> <p>Furthermore, all service business plans are submitted to the Corporate Directors for final approval, which includes scrutiny of measures and whether they are sufficiently outcome based.</p> <p><u>To address the recommendation, we will:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-balance the aggregated outcome and output focussed performance measures within Level 1 Business Plans across the Council.