



Report of the Director of Corporate Services

Governance and Audit Committee – 6 December 2023

Audit Wales Letter - Review of Council's Transformation Programme

Purpose:	This covering report seeks to provide an overview of the update letter issued by Audit Wales, regarding the progress Swansea Council is making around its Transformation Programme.
Policy Framework:	Transformation Strategy 2023-28
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal.
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that: 1) The Governance and Audit Committee read and review this information taking note of the recommendations and making comments.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2023, Audit Wales provided feedback, in the form of a letter, to Swansea Council about the audit work having been undertaken in relation to the council's Transformation Programme. The focus of this work was to understand if the council is effectively planning and monitoring its approach to its organisational transformation programme and the delivery of associated savings.
- 1.2 The letter (attached as Appendix A) reflected on the several iterations that the council's approach to transformation has been through, noting that it was appropriate for the council to reassess its Transformation Programme in November 2022, and establish a refreshed approach through its current 'Successful and Sustainable Swansea Transformation Programme 2022 and beyond'.

- 1.3 Given the significant refocus of the council's Transformation Programme over the last year, the feedback mainly covers this more recent period.
- 1.4 In undertaking this work, Audit Wales had observed meetings of the various Boards responsible for the oversight of the Transformation Programme, reviewed key documents and had interviewed key individuals.

2. Findings

2.1 The feedback letter notes that the *'overall view is that whilst many aspects of the council's strategic approach to planning, monitoring, and delivering its new Transformation Programme are well defined, some key arrangements could be strengthened to enable the Transformation Programme to adapt to the ongoing financial pressures and achieve its ambitions.'*

2.2 The main findings are set out below. The letter is divided into three main areas of feedback, as follows:

2.3 Transformation vision and strategy

2.3.1 The council has a clear transformation vision.

2.3.2 There is good integration between the council's new 2022 Transformation Strategy and its Corporate Plan.

2.3.3 Some of the twelve transformation programmes could more clearly describe their ambitions over the longer term.

2.4 Transformation planning and delivery

2.4.1 The council's Transformation Programme Plan provides a clear overview of the twelve Transformation Programmes.

2.4.2 The council has refocused its arrangements for how its Members are involved in its transformation programmes.

2.4.3 The link between the council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the current transformation programme could be more clearly defined.

2.5 Transformation governance and progress monitoring

2.5.1 The council has taken positive steps to identify and apply the learning from its former approaches to transformation.

2.5.2 The council has used existing governance and reporting structures to provide oversight at the individual transformation programme level which should help to reduce the risk of duplication and additional bureaucracy.

- 2.5.3 The Transformation Delivery Board should assure itself that it has the capacity to discharge its oversight role and has a clear understanding of the trajectory of the combined programme.
- 2.5.4 The Transformation Delivery Board should refine how it receives updates on transformation programme progress.
- 2.5.5 In the initial meetings of the Transformation Delivery Board the challenge and scrutiny has largely been focused on process and not on outcomes and impact.
- 2.5.6 The way the Transformation Delivery Board communicates with individual Programmes is still to be formalised.
- 2.5.7 The current suite of transformation programme metrics and measures should be enhanced through the development of outcome measures.

3. Council Response

3.1 The council welcomes the feedback from Audit Wales and in particular the useful suggestions to improve specific aspects of the overall programme delivery. The way in which the council is responding to the suggestions is set out below:

- i. To ensure the longer-term ambitions and objectives across all the twelve transformation programmes are clear

All twelve programmes have identified intended outcomes and benefits in the Programme Description document which was agreed by Cabinet in April 2023. All Programme Sponsors have been asked to review and update their intended outcomes and benefits for consideration by the Transformation Delivery Board on 14 December 2023

- ii. To make clearer the link between the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the current transformation programme.

The MTFP for 2024-28, which is currently under development, will clearly articulate links to the corporate transformation programme.

- iii. To ensure detailed planning documents have clearly defined timescales for when the Council plans to achieve the specified benefits and outcomes.

All Programme Sponsors will be asked to develop timescales for the planned achievement of intended outcomes and benefits, following TDB on 14 December. Planning documents will be updated and approved by individual programme boards and shared with TDB in March 2024.

- iv. To ensure the MTFP demonstrates how savings are being delivered by the Council, differentiating between business as usual and transformation related savings

The MTFP for 2024-28 will explain how savings are being delivered and will show how much is expected to be delivered through transformation. Savings delivery is being reported in quarterly budget monitoring reports to Cabinet and savings related to transformation can be distinguished from business as usual.

- v. To ensure the Transformation Delivery Board can identify interdependencies and opportunities between the twelve programmes.

Transformation Delivery Board receives highlight reports on each programme using a corporate template which requires reference to be made to links with other programmes. The new highlight report will be tested at TDB on 14 December.

- vi. To formalise the reporting and communications between the TDB, the individual programmes, and the necessary democratic processes.

TDB minutes are sent to all programme leads and required to be shared at the next programme board meeting. Highlight reports to TDB must include issues to be escalated. The overall transformation programme is scrutinised by the Scrutiny Programme Committee and individual programmes (or elements thereof) are supported by the relevant Service Transformation Committees and scrutinised by relevant performance panels at their discretion. The STCs and Scrutiny Performance Panels each have an annual work programme and are working through these.

- vii. To ensure the performance information focuses on benefits and outcomes as well as specific programme activities.

All programme Sponsors have been asked to ensure that they include information on benefits and outcomes as they develop their programme metrics. TDB will review effectiveness of the programme's performance indicators in March 2024 ahead of the new financial year.

4. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 4.1 The council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
- Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

4.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

4.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

4.2 This report sets out the key feedback / findings from a recent Audit Wales examination on the extent to which the council has progressed in relation to the Transformation Programme. Consultation or engagement is not needed or relevant to this report, and there is no relevant impact to consider.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A Audit Wales letter dated October 2023, reference no. 3854A2023

Appendix B IIA Screening Form