

# Core Business Enablers

In addition to the identified thematic and service priorities, there are a range of core business enablers which underpin the Council's daily functions and our delivery of services. Several are detailed within this section; however, ICT, Marketing & Media, Finance, People Management, Policy & Performance, Estates and Asset Management and Business Support have been interwoven within the content in well-being objectives 1-4 above.

## Legal

- We have ensured legality and probity in the Council's decision-making.
- We work within a statutory framework governing such things as the way meetings are run, the way decisions are taken and the legislation behind each decision which needs to be taken.
- We handle as much of the legal work needed by the Council in-house as we can, although there will be some occasions when we need to send work to external lawyers.
- Areas of focus during 2023/24 was supporting the work of the Regeneration Team in relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund, our Housing colleagues in bringing empty properties back into use, playing a key role in the Debt Recovery Project, advising on the Council's submissions to the National Covid-19 inquiry and implementing changes to court procedures in child protection cases.
- The range of legal work undertaken includes not just court and tribunal cases, but also advising Council committees, drafting legal documentation, and giving legal advice.

## Planning

- 87.5% (1,202 / 1,373) planning applications were determined on time during 2023/24, this is a slight decline on 89% last year.
- Of the 27 planning appeals received during 2023/24, 19 were dismissed (70.4%). This is an improvement on the previous year with 66.7%, it exceeds the Welsh Government Performance Framework for 'Good' of 66%.
- 22 out of the 33 Major planning applications determined in the year were completed within the time required to give a result of 69.7%, this is lower than target (80%) and a decline on last year (72.4%), but the determination of 10 historic cases impacted on the overall result. It should be noted that the Welsh Government rating of 'Good' is 60%.
- The average number of days taken to take positive planning enforcement action during 2023/24 has increased significantly to 306 days (211 days the previous year), this is mainly due to concentrating on the backlog cases, however, as these historic cases are closed, they continue to skew the average days.
- Our Planning Enforcement performance made a significant improvement on planning enforcement cases investigated within 84 days from 68.8% in 2022/23 to 84.3% in 2023/24.
- An Assurance Rating of 'High' was received during an Internal Audit inspection on Planning Enforcement to ensure that the systems and procedures in place for Planning Enforcement are robust.

## Procurement

- We spend an excess of £376 million per annum on goods, works and services, this has a significant impact on the quality of life for the community. It is vital we have a strategic approach to procurement to ensure that goods, works, and services are procured as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Under the new Procurement Act (2023), from October 2024, the Council is required to publish a pipeline of planned tenders over £2m (this first pipeline must be published 1 April 2025 – within 56 days of that deadline). The Procurement Unit will continue to engage with departments to accurately capture all tenders over this value in readiness for this deadline.
- A variety of supplier engagement initiatives and events were held in 2023/24 to accommodate a programme of tender exercises. The £160m Professional Works Framework is an example of a tender that adopted a wide variety of supplier engagement initiatives to attract local contractors to tender, to promote the tender requirements and to enhance tender submission's by offering tender support.
- In 2023/24 we supported the Swansea Bay City Deal's Digital Infrastructure Programme to appoint a provider for the design, build and operation of a dark fibre network linking key sites within the Swansea Bay City Deal (SBCD) Connected Places Programme to facilitate and invest in provision of a gigabit capable connectivity and associated infrastructure to key strategic sites and economic growth across the Region. The tender has been awarded to Virgin Media and contracts are currently being exchanged. We are also working with the SBCD Infrastructure Team to support with the rollout of Dark Fibre 2 (£4m) and the Rural Infill Project (£6m) which aims to bring superfast broadband to hard-to-reach rural areas.
- We work with departments to incorporate ways to reduce the carbon impact of procured goods, works or services. A Sustainable Risk Assessment (SRA) is completed for all tenders over the value of £25k (in accordance with our Contract Procurement Rules) which helps identify opportunities to embed actions into the tender to improve sustainability.

## Internal Audit

- Internal Audit is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the organisation's operations.
- 89% of the planned Internal Audits were completed during 2023/24. Despite some resource constraints, the Audit Plan progressed very well throughout the year and all 30 final reports were issued within 10 working days of the management responses being received.
- A review of our Internal Audit service by an external assessor for the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards was conducted during 2023/24, which concluded that the service was conforming to the standards.
- Internal Audit reports to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee, providing regular progress updates, with every Internal Audit Report is provided to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee.
- We have a Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP) in place, which assists to drive efficiency and improvement. Knowledge sharing and support bases have been embraced both with internal working groups within the Council, and externally through liaison with neighbouring authority Internal Audit teams and the Welsh Chief Internal Auditors group.

## Democratic Services

- Democratic Services manages the Council's decision-making process. The Council constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.
- 3,099 member enquiries were received during 2023/24, a 21% reduction the previous year (4,365). Over 76% were responded to within 7 working days, an improvement on previous year (73%).
- The service was instrumental in delivering the recommendations of the Member Enquiries Review and implementation of the new Online Members Portal which was launched in February 2024 and provided a new and improved platform for members to log and monitor Councillor Service requests and enquiries.
- The service continues to administer joint working arrangements for Wales Pension Partnership Joint Governance Committee, the Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Panel, and Y Partneriaeth. It also has responsibility for administering Llesiant Delta Wellbeing Governance Group and CWM Shareholders Board.

## Electoral Services and Civil Registration

- Our electoral services are underpinned by a legal framework which establishes how elections are delivered. It sets out who is allowed to vote and the various ways they can cast their vote and have their say. We have a strong Election Project Team that help support us in delivering safe, transparent, and open elections.
- We continue to administer all types of elections (scheduled or snap elections) and with the introduction of the Modern Democracy app, it ensures accuracy of the ballot paper accounts.
- We continued work with data matching of our records against Council Tax, Housing Benefits, Payroll and Education records to ensure the Electoral Register is up to date. We will be one of few Welsh Authorities that will take part in an Automatic Registration Pilot that will commence in the Autumn of 2024.
- We commenced a statutory review of our Polling Districts and Polling Places, the aim of which is to ensure we have the right voting facilities within each electoral division, taking account of new developments and looking for alternative venues, that have suitable disability access.
- The Council's Registration Service has the statutory function of providing a responsive service to the public for the registration of births, stillbirths, deaths; notices of marriage and civil partnership and consequent ceremonies; production of legal documentation and the approval of premises for marriages and partnerships; it is also responsible for citizenship ceremonies. The Service offers a range of non-statutory ceremonies and also delivers on request, the 'Tell Us Once' service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 15 Citizenship Ceremonies were conducted during 2023/24 all completed within 60 days of the Home Office invitation, these covered 76 Adults and 9 children, compared to 50 Adults and 4 children during 2022/23.
- There were 2,461 birth registrations recorded during 2023/24, an increase on 2,395 in 2022/23 and 2,447 death registrations recorded, this is lower than 2,721 in 2022/23.
- The number of marriages and civil partnerships have reduced from 800 in 2022/23 to 706 in 2023/24 although this is a 13% decrease in marriages and 44% increase in civil partnerships.

## **Risk Management**

- 94% of response to letters of claim were completed within 6 working days of receipt at the Risk Management Section during 2023/24, this covered issuing acknowledgement letter to claimant / claimant's legal representative, and referral of claim to appropriate insurer.
- The Risk Management Steering Group invested £250k during 2023/24 in areas to reduce the risk of claims or expensive litigation. Such as towards driver training, a temporary Contract Management – Health Review Project Officer position, and funded safeguarding and security fencing in some of our schools within the County.
- Data from the Corporate Risk Register is reported to the Governance and Audit Committee on a six-monthly basis following bi-monthly review and critical assessment of the risks by Corporate Management Team.
- Risk Management Action Plan for Improvement is in place and monitors progress on Audit Wales, Internal Audit and Transformation Board recommendations.