

Committee: **Governance and Audit Committee**

Date of meeting: **8<sup>th</sup> March 2023**

Report Subject: **Audit Wales: Springing Forward – Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Steve Thomas, Leader / Cabinet Member Corporate Overview and Performance**

Report Submitted by: **Rhian Hayden, Chief Officer Resources**  
**Sarah King, Head of Democratic Services, Governance and Partnerships**  
**Andrea Prosser, Head of Organisation Development**  
**Ellie Fry, Director of Community Services and Regeneration**

| Reporting Pathway           |                           |                          |                                |                               |                    |         |         |                      |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|---------|---------|----------------------|
| Directorate Management Team | Corporate Leadership Team | Portfolio Holder / Chair | Governance and Audit Committee | Democratic Services Committee | Scrutiny Committee | Cabinet | Council | Other (please state) |
|                             | 23.02.23                  |                          | 08.03.23                       |                               |                    |         |         |                      |

1. **Purpose of the Report**
  - 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with the Audit Wales Report, '*Springing Forward*' (Appendix 1).
2. **Scope and Background**
  - 2.1 Audit Wales published their report, '*Springing Forward*' in November 2022 and covers the audit year 2021/22.
  - 2.2 Following the global pandemic, Audit Wales looked at how the Council is strengthening its ability to transform, adapt and maintain the delivery of services, including those delivered in partnership with key stakeholders and communities.
  - 2.3 Audit Wales reviewed the Council's arrangements for managing its assets and workforce:
    - (a) For assets, the primary focus was on office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivers services to its residents; and
    - (b) For workforce, the focus was on the challenges highlighted during the pandemic that have exacerbated some long-standing workforce issues.
  - 2.4 Overall, Audit Wales found that during the pandemic the Council made significant changes to its assets and the way that its workforce operates. Further work is needed for Council to understand its future asset and workforce needs to ensure that future decisions are appropriately informed by Equality Impact Assessments and the sustainable development principle.

2.5 Audit Wales identified recommendations covering the following areas:

- **Equality impact assessments**
  - Ensure that all decisions are informed by a timely equality impact assessment where required.
  
- **Develop a longer-term asset strategy**
  - In developing its new strategic asset management strategy, the Council should apply the sustainable development principle and specifically ensure that it:
    - builds on learning from its experience of the COVID-19 pandemic;
    - takes account of longer-term trends that may affect service provision and the efficient use of assets;
    - aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, workforce and digital strategies;
    - sets out the Council's intended outcomes over the short, medium and longer term;
    - takes account of the needs of staff, service users and partners; and
    - sets out SMART performance measures and appropriate monitoring and reporting arrangements.
  
- **Further develop workforce strategy and planning**
  - In delivering its workforce strategy, the Council should ensure that it:
    - incorporates learning from the COVID-19 pandemic;
    - takes a sufficiently long-term view, for example, taking into account upcoming reviews of service delivery and longer-term trends which may affect workforce planning;
    - provides service managers with the necessary skills and capacity to develop their workforce plans;
    - collates service workforce plans to understand what actions it needs to take at a corporate level to strengthen its workforce;
    - expands workforce information to include detail on:
      - i. current skills and current and future skills gaps;
      - ii. talent and succession planning; and
      - iii. critical posts and the risks associated with them becoming vacant;
    - strengthens the underlying action plans by developing SMART objectives so progress can be monitored and scrutinised; and
    - aligns with other strategic documents, including decarbonisation, commercial, asset management and digital strategies.
  
- **Engagement**
  - As part of the review of the new operating model, seek the views of residents on the community hubs to provide assurance around

the Council's decision and to inform the future development of hubs.

- Consider how the Council might adapt its public engagement methods so it can continue to engage with the public in the event of future lockdowns or other restrictions.
- Work with local businesses to monitor and understand the impact of the closure of the Civic Centre and how the Council can support those businesses whilst the site remains vacant.

- **Resources**

- Identify the costs of delivering the assets and workforce strategies and incorporate these into the medium-term financial strategy.
- Collaborate with public sector partners across Gwent to evaluate the potential benefits of developing a strategic long-term approach to a single public estate.
- Build on existing examples of collaborative working by developing a more systematic approach to collaboration.

- **Sustainable development principle**

- The Council should seek to fully embed the sustainable development principle in its decision making.

Full detail of these recommendations can be found in Appendix 1.

## 2.6 **Next Steps**

The recommendations identified within the Audit Wales Report, found at paragraph 2.5, relate to a number of Council areas, therefore the actions will be undertaken by the lead officers who submitted the report.

The recommendations will be included within all of the relevant business plans for monitoring and reporting including:

- Tier 1 and 2 Governance and Partnership Business Plans to include: Impact Assessments; Engagement; and the Sustainable Development Principle.
- Tier 2 Organisational Development Business Plan to include workforce strategy and planning
- Tier 1 Resources business plan to include Resources
- Tier 2 Regeneration business plan to include Asset Management Strategy

## 3. **Options for Recommendation**

3.1 Prior to the final report being provided to the Council, CLT and relevant Officers provided comment back to Audit Wales on their findings.

### 3.2 **Option 1**

Governance and Audit Committee is assured that the Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.6, will appropriately respond to the Audit Wales recommendations.

## **Option 2**

Provide comment on the Audit Wales review and Next Steps, identified in paragraph 2.6, to address the recommendation for Officers to implement in order to provide continuous improvement.

### **4. Monitoring Arrangements**

- 4.1 The recommendations from Audit Wales will be included within the business plans and updated on a quarterly basis.

The information will be reported within the Joint Finance and Performance Report and Directorate Reports provided to Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

Regular meetings are held with Audit Wales to assess progress of reports.

### **Background Documents /Electronic Links**

*Appendix 1 – Audit Wales Report – Springing Forward*