

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2014-2017



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This Corporate Improvement Plan is Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council's improvement plan, prepared under Section 15(6) of the [Local Government \(Wales\) Measure](#) (referred to as the 2009 Measure), and which discharges the Council's duties under sections 2(1), 3(2) and 8(7).

The Corporate Improvement Plan is available on the Council's website www.npt.gov.uk/improvement

In order to promote sustainability and to reduce printing costs, a hard copy of this Plan and the Delivery Programme is available at these locations: Neath One Stop Shop, Civic Centre, Neath SA11 3QZ; Port Talbot Civic Centre, Port Talbot SA13 1PJ; and

Pontardawe Library, Holly Street Pontardawe SA8 4ET.

If you require this information in larger print or in an alternative format, please contact the Corporate Strategy Team on 01639 763677 or email: improvement@npt.gov.uk

Message from the Leader and Chief Executive

Welcome to our Corporate Improvement Plan (referred to as the Plan) for 2014-2017.

The Council has a sound track record of prioritising services for Children and Young People; the vulnerable and most disadvantaged and this policy will continue. In this Plan we set out the steps we will be taking to deliver on our commitment to safeguarding employment to the maximum extent possible, whilst seeking out and exploiting all opportunities to improve the prosperity and wellbeing of local people in our communities in times of severe and enduring austerity.

The UK Government's public sector spending decisions, coupled with increasing pressure on major services such as Social Services and Education, combine to place severe pressure on the Council's resources. In 2014-2015 some £17.3 million of savings are needed to achieve a balanced budget with a total of £38.3 million to be cut from our spending plans over the period 2014-2018. Work has commenced to identify the majority of strategies required to deliver the additional £21million savings, but further work will be required to close the remaining gap over the next few years.

We have worked hard, with the support and input of our workforce, trade unions and partners, to develop a balanced package of spending reductions, income generating measures and service changes to respond to the challenges we face. We also pay tribute to the many responses we have had, and continue to receive, to our consultations with service users and our wider communities which have provided legitimate challenge and different perspectives to our proposed changes that have often enriched and shaped our final proposals. Without these strong partnership and community relations we are in no doubt that our task would have been far more difficult. We would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to offer their ideas and comments.

We therefore now set out the actions we intend to take in the next 12 months to progress the six improvement priorities (referred to as our improvement objectives) that were established by the political administration elected in May 2012. We have made good progress in the first 12 months and intend to introduce a sharper focus in the coming year, taking account of the very challenging financial context within which we need to work. Our programme for 2014-2015 is set out in this Plan.



Councillor Ali Thomas, Leader of the Council



Chief Executive, Steven Phillips

Section 1 Introduction

This Plan sets out the top priorities the Council will focus on over the next three years, as well as building on the progress that has been made to date. These priorities are firmly anchored in the new financial reality facing the Council and are referred to as our improvement objectives.

Our six improvement objectives are:

1. Improve outcomes for children in need and children looked after by improving the performance of the Council's Children and Young People Services Department – **'Safer, Brighter Futures'**
2. Raise educational standards and attainment for all young people – **'Brighter Schools Brighter Prospects'**
3. Maximise the number of adults who are able to live independently with or without support within the home of their choice within their community – **'Maximising Choice and Independence'**
4. Support and invest in our town centres and communities to promote economic growth, regeneration and sustainability to maximise job opportunities and improve access to employment – **'Prosperity for All'**
5. Increase the percentage of waste recycled and composted – **'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle'**
6. Improved customer/citizen access to services and functions provided by the Council, or on behalf of the Council, and to improve the efficiency of those services and functions – **'Better, Simpler, Cheaper'**

Supporting the Single Integrated Plan

The six improvement objectives also support the vision for Neath Port Talbot as set out in the County Borough's [Single Integrated Plan 2013-2023](#), which was published last year:

'Creating a Neath Port Talbot where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer and prosperous'

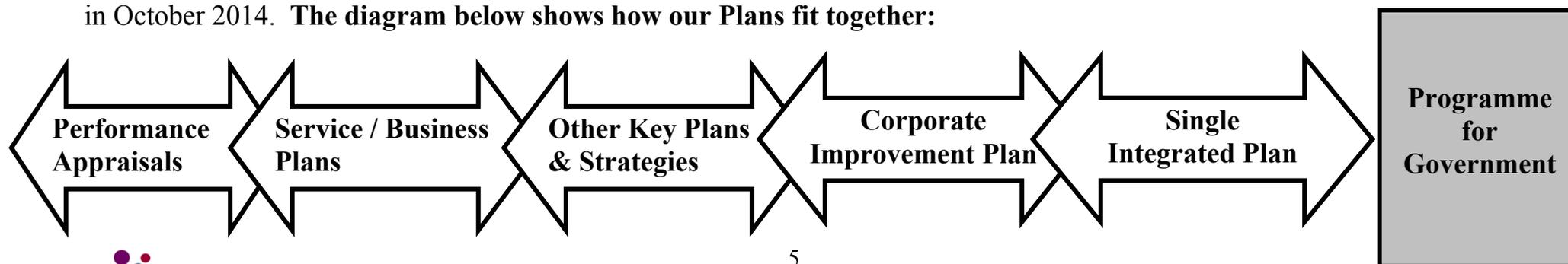
The Single Integrated Plan is the Local Service Board's Plan to improve the health and wellbeing of local people. The Local Service Board is a strategic partnership forum in Neath Port Talbot which brings together senior leaders from across the public, private and voluntary sectors to identify and agree areas for collaborative working that will improve the wellbeing of local people.

There are four cross cutting priorities in the Single Integrated Plan which the Council embraces within this Plan. These cross cutting priorities are Children and Young People, Anti Poverty, Health Inequities and Transport. You will see what the Council's planned contribution to these cross cutting priorities is as you read through the programmes for each improvement objective. Further details which show the wider contribution of our partners in delivering the Single Integrated Plan will be captured in the Single Integrated Plan Annual Report, which will be published in June, 2014.

The long term impact of the work we are doing is aimed to make a clear contribution to the following seven aspects of improvement that come under the 2009 Measure, which we have a legal duty to address:

1. Making progress towards an authority's strategic objectives (as set out in the Single Integrated Plan);
2. Improving the quality of services;
3. Improving the availability of services;
4. Fairness, especially in reducing inequality in accessing or benefiting from services, or improving the wellbeing of citizens and communities;
5. Exercising functions in ways that contribute to the sustainable development of an area;
6. Improving the efficiency of services and functions; and
7. Innovation and change which contributes to any of the above objectives.

This Plan focuses specifically on our priorities for improvement, but this does not mean that we are not seeking to bring about continuous improvement in all services and functions. Continuous improvement activity is delivered through service and business planning arrangements and supported by our corporate services such as Human Resources, Finance and ICT. We will demonstrate how the wider range of Council services is performing in our Annual Report, which will be published in October 2014. **The diagram below shows how our Plans fit together:**



Section 2 Making the most of our Resources

The Council has less money available to spend on services than ever before due to the UK Government's public sector spending decisions. Coupled with this, pressure on our major services continues to increase in terms of demand and expectation. With less resources available this year and for future years to come, the Council will need to work even more efficiently and effectively, to maintain services and improve where we can. Under these very challenging conditions we may not be able to improve on some services and in some cases performance may drop. There will be a major step change in how we deliver our services and inevitably we will have to stop delivering some services and deliver others in a very different way to what people may expect.

Achieving the budget savings of some £17.3 million for the coming year has been the toughest to date and difficult decisions on cuts have been unavoidable as a consequence. The savings have been identified as a result of a prolonged and intense professional and Cabinet Member input, which has examined current service provision and then proposed, over the longer term, fundamental changes in the way the Council operates and delivers its services. Where appropriate, proposals have been subject to consultation with service users, staff and trade unions; scrutinised by the relevant committees; and prepared in the context of prioritising the six improvement objectives listed in this Plan.

Equality Impact Assessment

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to assess the likely impact of proposed policies and practices on its ability to comply with the general duty (to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between different groups; and foster good relations between different groups) for all people with protected characteristics. This is known as an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and the annual budget setting is seen as a key policy or practice in this context.

The Council has undertaken an EIA, whereby the potential impacts of the various budget proposals upon the general population and the various protected characteristics have been considered as part of the decision making process. It is not always possible to lessen unfavourable impacts totally for the whole population or protected characteristics. However, the budget proposals seek to take into account what is proportionate for the population, including the protected characteristics.

With this background, understanding the impact of the various budget proposals and ultimately the decisions on the whole population has been more crucial than ever. The budget savings identified for 2014-2015 have resulted in an overall negative impact on the Council's ability to continue to deliver services at the same level as in previous years.

The Council's plan to close the budget gap is through a combination of several different, but complimentary strategies, as follows:

- Ensuring that all the individual savings identified in the Forward Financial Plan (FFP) are delivered in full;
- Improved efficiency and the elimination of waste – partly achieved from the range of system reviews that are taking place;
- A council tax increase of 4.5%; and
- Selective increases in fees and charges for some services that we provide.

All of these individual elements will make an essential contribution to preparing next year's budget and all need to be delivered in full.

The following provides a brief outline of the service implications in relation to each improvement objective as a result of the savings being identified:

- **Schools** – the Council will protect the budget as required by Welsh Government and as a result schools will have approximately £200k more resources than in 2013-2014;
- **Children's and Young People Services (CYPS)** – the Council will be investing £22 million in its CYPS. This will fund the professional elements of the workforce, to improve social work practice and enable better support and outcomes for Children and Families. We have also increased the budget to cover the cost of adoptions to enable the appropriate management and reduction in the number of children looked after. The review and development of early intervention and prevention services through the Think Family Partnership Board will further strengthen and improve services during the next 12 months. There are only some minor efficiency savings required from the service;

- **Adult Social Care** – the Council is progressing well to improve services for the elderly and disabled. Over recent years the Council has entered into partnership with Grŵp Gwalia, to renew its residential care homes and the first new care home in Moor Road is due to be operational in the summer of 2014. The Council has reviewed and is consulting on policy changes under the TASC (Transforming Adult Social Care) programme to enable people to live independently and to provide alternative and more cost efficient services to adults and people with disabilities. It is extremely important that this work progresses in a timely fashion and efficiencies are achieved, as this is a service area experiencing growth and demand pressures;
- **Environment** – of the three main Directorates, this one has already had to tighten its belt the most (largely due to the protection given to Social Services and Education). Also in line with the Council’s improvement objectives, it is proposed to give a degree of protection to Waste Collection Services with the aim of improving recycling performance and minimise the risk of financial penalties if we do not achieve statutory recycling targets; and
- **Workforce** – the Council will see a number of staff leaving under the Early Retirement/Voluntary Redundancy (ER/VR) scheme. This will certainly impact on service capacity and in some cases require those service areas to be reorganised.

Robust budget monitoring will be an essential requirement to ensure that the budget savings are delivered. Each individual Scrutiny Board will meet throughout the year to scrutinise the implementation of the savings proposals and to monitor if the savings are being met. Further work will be required to update the Forward Financial Plan to 2017-2018 and to identify additional income/savings in order to balance the annual budgets for that period.

Where you can get more information:

- [Budget Report](#) (Cabinet 29th January 2014)

Section 3 Improvement Highlights for the last 12 months 2013-2014

Over the last year we have made good progress in most areas and slow progress in some others in relation to our six improvement objectives. Below is a brief summary of what we achieved:

‘Safer, Brighter Futures’

- We made improvements in CYPS our priority, following the decision of the Chief Inspector of the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSiW) to invoke the Serious Concerns Protocol.
- We are pleased that the CSSiW has acknowledged the progress we have demonstrated to date.
- We have accelerated the pace of change in CYPS and are committed to sustaining this programme, with a specific focus on improving the quality and consistency of social work practice and in putting early intervention and prevention work with partners on a far more effective footing. Our aim is to ensure children and young people are effectively safeguarded, and that fewer families require intervention by CYPS.

‘Brighter Schools Brighter Prospects’

- We continued to implement our Strategic Schools Improvement Programme which included opening a new state of the art primary school Awel-y-Môr to replace Glan-y-Môr and Tirmorfa primary schools in September 2013.
- During the 2012-2013 academic year, schools in Neath Port Talbot secured a steady improvement in pupil performance at Key Stage 4. The wider external points scored by 16 year olds have increased by 10.49% to 537. The percentage of pupils who achieved the level 2 threshold including English/Welsh first language and Mathematics increased and is above the Welsh average. Only two pupils left school without a recognised qualification.
- Most of the key stage outcome measures for literacy and numeracy have improved and an increase in the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals in most performance indicators.
- Attendance at secondary schools continues to increase and the number of days lost to fixed-term exclusions is falling at a steady rate.

‘Maximising Choice and Independence’

- Our Transforming Adult Social Care (TASC) programme is broadly on track to achieve the identified benefits. We have made good progress in helping more adults with a learning disability to live in the community and as independently as possible.
- We have trialled a new integrated model of intermediate care known as the Gateway Service, although there has been a small delay, the service become operational in January 2014.
- Progress in consulting on proposals to modernise other services, such as day services and community meals has been slower than expected, however, in December 2013 authority was given by elected members to initiate public consultation on a range of proposals and progressing these initiatives is a priority for us in 2014-2015.
- We transferred our residential care service to Grŵp Gwalia in 2011 in order that we could secure replacement facilities in local communities that would improve the dignity and care for our most frail elderly residents. We are delighted that the first of the four new care homes is on target to open by June 2014, and that the planning for the other three replacement homes is advancing satisfactorily.

‘Prosperity for All’

- We are particularly proud of the performance we have achieved in delivering big capital projects. We are working in very challenging financial circumstances but despite this we have completed a major highway development at Harbour Way which will open up new regeneration opportunities in future years; a new landmark community enterprise centre at Croeserw was opened in 2013; we completed further improvements at Pontardawe along with many other improvements to our town centres and communities across the County Borough.
- We continued to provide an effective support service creating more jobs and business start-ups.

‘Reduce, Reuse, Recycle’

- The percentage of waste recycled and composted, following the adoption of the revised Waste Strategy in April 2013, has shown steady improvement over the 12 months. Having not achieved the statutory target of 52% during 2012-2013, we will now exceed this target in 2013-2014. We aim to increase our rates to 55% during 2014-2015 and will work towards achieving the 2015-2016 statutory target of 58%.

‘Better, Simpler, Cheaper’

- We have made good progress in increasing the number of services available “on-line”. These included the booking of household bulk collections and ordering services for refuse and recycling equipment. Our new on line services will offer greater choice for local people in how they interact with the Council, will make services available out of normal office hours and also be cheaper to administer.
- We have also made progress in taking forward our programme to streamline our major management and administrative processes, although the pace of change needs to increase next year.

All of this has been achieved whilst delivering £30 million savings in line with our FFP during the last four years in our revenue budget.

We were also successful in securing the full Outcome Agreement grant payment of £1.4 million from the Welsh Government based on overall achievement of agreed actions and performance measures for 2012-2013. The Outcome Agreement is a three year Agreement for the period April 2010 to March 2013. The Agreement describes how the priorities identified by the Council, working in partnership with a range of local agencies, will help to improve the overall wellbeing of Wales. The payment of the Outcome Agreement Grant is dependent on an evaluation undertaken by Welsh Government on how well the Council has successfully achieved the outcomes set out in the Agreement. A new three year Outcome Agreement for the period April 2013 to March 2016 is currently being agreed with the Welsh Government.

Section 4 Planned Improvement Work in 2014-2015

Overall we have made a strong start to delivering the six improvement objectives we established in 2013-2014. This part of the Plan summarises the improvement work we intend to take forward in support of those objectives during the next 12 months (2014-2015) with more detail set out in our Delivery Programme (a document which contains more detail on how we will deliver the planned improvements).

Our improvement objectives take into account local priorities affecting the County Borough and also national priorities set out by the Welsh Government in their overarching policy 'Programme for Government' (which is the Welsh Government's road map outlining the outcomes it is working towards to improve the lives of people in Wales).

In developing our programme for the next 12 months we have taken particular account of:

- The Council routinely reviews and re-assesses the relevance and affordability of the improvement objectives on an annual basis. This Plan for 2014-2017 clearly sets the improvement work in the context of the agreed FFP, and capacity to implement the change activities listed is explicitly considered as part of this process;
- The significant additional financial savings target we need to meet in 2014-2015;
- Feedback from the CSSiW on the progress we have made in progressing our Children's Improvement Programme; and
- Commitments and developments the Council has entered into with other local authorities on a regional basis, in particular, the emerging City Region Partnership; the Western Bay Health and Social Care Collaborative; the Regional Transport Consortia (South West Wales Integrated Transport Consortium); the newly formed regional school improvement collaborative Education through Regional Working (ERW); and the developments of the Regional Waste Collaborative.

One of the areas we will focus more on over the course of this Plan will be to mitigate the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms. The impact of these reforms will vary enormously from place to place and several of the reforms are likely to impact simultaneously on the same households and/or individuals. The welfare reforms will have a significant impact on many residents within the County Borough. Neath Port Talbot is listed as the tenth worst affected Council (across England and Wales) to be affected by the reforms by 2014-2015.

To address this we have intensified our work with partners. The Low Income Families Project (LIF) has brought together relevant partners to support families on low incomes. The project has identified who is most affected and how existing systems and arrangements can be developed to ensure that those most in need receive the help and support they require. Through partnership working we were able to identify all of those affected by the benefits cap and the bedroom tax, and we have offered many of those affected financial support through the use of discretionary housing payments.

Our Welfare Rights Unit has also continued to provide support for people in receipt of disability benefits, assisting people to successfully appeal benefit decisions which have cut or removed the benefits that they are entitled to. In the next 12 months we will build on this work with an emphasis on integrating services across agencies to make it easier for people to access the help and support they need. Using European funding available to the Local Service Board, the LIF programme has identified three pilot projects which will all run for a period of six months. These are:

- **Project one** - the Multi Agency Hub at Pontardawe will bring services together to provide benefit advice; job search support and money/debt management into one location;
- **Project two** - the dedicated advice line set up in the Council's Corporate Contact Centre to help citizens access benefits advice; and
- **Project three** - one stop help for people actively seeking work through joint working between the library service and the Jobcentre.

In addition to the above, a variety of other work has been undertaken by partners such as a local advice providers' directory, which identifies organisations operating in Neath Port Talbot and the level of support available for people on a low income. A number of presentations on the development of the LIF projects have been delivered to groups who represent people on a low income, including the voluntary sector and the Older Persons' Consultation Forum.

An evaluation of the European funded projects will be carried out during the year and we will report back a summary of the findings in our Annual Report (to be published in October 2014).

Section 5 Consultation on our Improvement Objectives

As required under the 2009 Measure, we are required to consult on our improvement objectives. This year the consultation exercise lasted for a four week period and focused on our proposed activities for the next 12 months under each improvement objective by asking if these were clear and easy to understand, and if stake holders believed the proposed activities would help us to achieve our priorities.

We sought the views from a wide range of audiences as listed below:

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council elected Members; Community Councillors, Local Service Board partners; Neath Port Talbot Council for Voluntary Service/Third Sector organisations; Health, Social Care and Well Being partnership; Safer Neath Port Talbot Management Group; Think Families Partnership; Youth Council; Older Persons' Council (OPC); Neath Port Talbot Carers' Forum; Economic Prosperity Partnership; Environment Partnership; Communities First cluster managers to share with partnerships; Black Minority Ethnic (BME) Forum members; Swansea Bay Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Forum; Disability Network Action Group (DNAG); Disabled Persons' Advisory Group (DPAG); Listen to Us Group – Self advocacy group for adults with learning disabilities; Housing Partnership; Supporting People and Homeless Strategy Group; Local Assembly Members/Local Members of Parliament/Local Members of European Parliament; Learning Partnerships including Schools (via Head Teachers); Council employees; local businesses database (1000 plus listed); and Neath Town Centre Consortium.

The consultation exercise was promoted via a variety of communication channels such as social media, our website, email, posters in key civic buildings such libraries, community centres and main civic centres. We also took the opportunity to speak to a number of organisations through their meetings to raise the awareness of the consultation exercise. These included BME Forum meeting, OPC Cabinet Liaison Forum meeting, Voluntary Sector Liaison Committee meeting and a DPAG meeting.

In total there were 59 responses. Overall, 90.1% of respondents agreed that the proposed activities for all six improvement objectives were easy to understand, 9.3% disagreed and 0.6% did not answer the question. 79.1% of respondents agreed that the proposed activities will help us to achieve the outcome objectives, 19.8% disagreed and 1.1% did not answer the question.

A number of changes were made to the activities as a result of the feedback, some of these include:

- Further information has been included in the Corporate Improvement Plan glossary to address a number of consultation comments received;
- Some actions relating to improving housing quality and affordability were moved from objective number three - Maximising Choice and Independence to objective number four - Prosperity for All, as they were more suited to prosperity;
- Adding a specific action in objective number two, to continue to consult with pupils, parents, staff, governors on all aspects of education provision through dedicated consultation events and annual roadshow meetings across the County Borough; and
- Adding an action around carers in objective number three.

Equalities information can be found in appendix 2 of the Consultation Feedback Document.

Where you can get more information:

- [Local Government Wales Measure \(2009\)](#)

Section 6 Our Improvement Objectives



IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 1

Improve outcomes for children in need and children looked after by improving the performance of the Council's Children and Young People Services Department

Why is this important?

Following an inspection in November 2012 by CSSiW, the Chief Inspector of CSSiW invoked the Serious Concerns Protocol, as it was felt that there are significant risks to the welfare and safety of children in Neath Port Talbot.

The Council has accepted the conclusions and recommendations set out in the CSSiW report in full. A strategic improvement plan explaining the actions the Council will now take to deliver the improvements necessary, was approved by the Council's Cabinet in March 2013 and is now being implemented.

Following a year of improvement, the CSSiW undertook a further full inspection of Council's CYPS in October 2013 and noted some key improvements. This was particularly evidenced around the use of safeguarding procedures. However, the CSSiW and the Council agree that there is a need to improve the quality and consistency of the case work across the service.

Through the Think Family Partnership, we will accomplish the work streams that are set out principally in the Team Around the Family (TAF) service model. This approach will deliver joined up services, between CYPS, schools, health, police, as well as adult services. The aim will be to intervene much earlier with families which show the criteria of distress (preferably before children reach the age of two), in order to prevent the tragedy of families being broken up and children being taken into care, and evaluate the massive cost of high level intervention services for those families and across the public services system.

What difference do we want to make?

We want to achieve our vision for CYPS which is:

**‘Safer, brighter futures for all Children in Neath Port Talbot’
and**

‘The Children and Young People Services Department is highly regarded by children, young people and the wider community and is a great place to work’

What are we going to do in the next 12 months?

We will:

- Improve the quality and effectiveness of social work practice and continue to improve performance of our eight priority measures which showed significant improvement in 2013-2014. We also want the number of children looked after in the County Borough to show a 2.5% year on year decrease over the next two years;
- Ensure that the capacity and capability of the workforce will meet the demands on the service by minimising social worker vacancies and use of agency workers, ensure all employees in the service have an agreed Personal Development Plan and by March 2015, show that 72% of staff feel valued at work from our staff survey (it was 58.8% in 2012);
- Ensure that improving CYPS remains a priority for the Council and its partners and that there is continued strong and supportive political and professional leadership for the improvement programme;
- Further enhance performance management and elected member scrutiny arrangements, by developing a new model which will put better checks and balances in place, so that service delivery is not compromised; and
- Formally adopt the new Corporate Parenting Policy and ensure that the Corporate Parenting Panel hold a celebration and information day to recognise the achievements of looked after children; and support care leavers by commissioning contracts with Housing providers to provide suitable long term accommodation for young people who leave the care system.

In partnership, we will:

- Accomplish the work streams that are set out principally in the TAF, through the Think Family Partnership. This will mean: access to different services are clearer to service users and providers; early intervention and prevention will mean

a reduction in demand for costly intervention services across the partnership and a reduction in the number of children looked after.

Link to Single Integrated Plan:

The above improvements link to the cross cutting priority listed on page 6 in the [Single Integrated Plan](#) for Children and Young People.

Where you can get more information:

- Corporate Improvement Plan Delivery Programme gives more information on how we will deliver the above priorities.
- [‘Safer, Brighter Futures - Children and Young People Services Strategic Improvement Plan 2013-2016’](#)
- Further information about the Think Families Partnership is available on the professionals pages of www.nptfamily.com

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 2

Raise educational standards and attainment for all young people

Why is this important?

The Council aims to raise standards in both school and pupil performance, and to secure continuous improvement in service delivery, so that all children and young people in Neath Port Talbot get the best start in life.

We have identified 23% of our mainstream schools that need to improve specifically on outcomes for children through our monitoring process. These schools will be provided with additional support to help them achieve and compare more favourably with similar schools.

To achieve this aim, we want to ensure that all of our schools are fit for purpose and that they are capable of delivering high quality educational experiences for all pupils. Some of our school buildings are also in need of significant repair due to their age. We also need to continue to address the 6,604 surplus school places we have across our schools due to falling birth rates.

In 2008, the Council approved an approach to school improvement, known as the Strategic School Improvement Programme (SSIP) based on the following principles:

1. standard of educational provision;
2. need for places and accessibility of schools;
3. standard and suitability of school accommodation; and
4. effective financial management.

What difference do we want to make?

The Council aims to deliver an effective education service that enables all young people to maximise their learning potential. We want to continually improve the performance of schools and education of young people. We will empower all schools to become excellent and ensure high quality provision for all learners. These changes will improve the educational environment for pupils, staff and communities and will improve outcomes for children. We also want to increase the levels of attendance in all our schools.

What are we going to do in the next 12 months?

We will:

- Continue with the delivery of the SSIP and following consultations (in some cases with Welsh Government determination), this will include federating (merging) some schools; relocating some schools; increasing the capacity in some schools; continuing with our arrangements to build some new schools; and to close some others;
- Continue to work with developers to ensure appropriate educational provisions are available in the new Coed Darcy Village commencing with a 3-11 primary school;
- Continue to implement our strategy for the provision of Welsh medium education in Neath Port Talbot and we will measure our success against outcomes as detailed in our delivery plan;
- Consult on a new Welsh medium school in the north of the County Borough and a new Welsh medium school in the south of the County Borough;
- Ensure that a school led improvement model is promoted and supported through: school to school collaboration; cluster development; and improvement partnerships and increase the number mainstream Schools which are good / outstanding (as per the criteria determined with regional partners) from 58% to 68% in 2014-2015;
- Support schools and enable schools to support each other in implementing the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes across all key stages (years 2, 6, 9 & 11);
- Ensure that the 14-19 Learning Pathways programme supports all young people to achieve their full learning potential and by providing a range of relevant courses (including vocational courses) we aim to improve attainment levels for year 11 pupils and continue to work with young people who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at post 16 and have less than 3% being NEET in 2014-2015;

- Improve the performance of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM) in Literacy & Numeracy. This will include improving the quality of teaching; improving engagement with parents/carers and identify and facilitate opportunities for pooling resources, for example through Communities First & Flying Start projects;
- Improve pupil attendance by continuing to provide advice and support to all schools and to those schools with lower attendance levels, scrutinise attendance and share best practice within schools;
- Continue to improve safeguarding practices and procedures to ensure that all schools judged by Estyn meet statutory requirements;
- Improve and enhance behaviour management by aiming to have fewer permanent exclusions across all our schools and to reduce the number of days lost to fixed term exclusions. This work will include improving capacity within schools to manage behaviour, so that intervention is employed at the early stages of challenging behaviour and specific support for targeted schools on behaviour management; and
- Continue to consult with pupils, parents, staff, governors on all aspects of education provision through dedicated consultation events and annual roadshow meetings across the County Borough.

In partnership, we will:

- Continue to deliver school improvement through our partnership in ERW. The partnership consisting of six local authorities will: share best practice amongst schools in the ERW region; monitor school performance; support school leadership; co-ordinate high quality governor training, and ensure that the delivery of the Literacy and Numeracy Framework is effective across all schools.

Link to Single Integrated Plan:

The above improvements link to the cross cutting priority listed on page 6 in the [Single Integrated Plan](#) for Children and Young People.

Where you can get more information:

- Corporate Improvement Plan Delivery Programme gives more information on how we will deliver the above priorities.
- ‘Becoming excellent – Performance Improvement Plan 2013-2015 and subsequent service plans.
- More information on the Strategic Schools Improvement Programme can be found at www.npt.gov.uk/SSIP



IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 3

Maximise the number of adults who are able to live independently with or without support within the home of their choice within their community

Why is this important?

National and local research indicates that we have to change the way adult social care is provided if we are to meet the needs of the increasing number of older and vulnerable people living in our community. We cannot continue to provide services in the way that we have due to the severe financial pressure on resources. We need to be able to respond to these needs and ensure that the money we spend is delivering the best outcome for those that require our services. In addition, expectations are increasingly focused on adults remaining independent within the home of their choice, with good quality support as necessary, for as long as possible.

By 2020, it is projected there will be some 6,250 additional people aged over 65 in Neath Port Talbot (24% increase). By 2025 there will be 35,800 people aged 65 plus (37% increase). The ageing population brings opportunities as many volunteers, carers and people who stimulate community life are over 65. However, it also brings challenges for Adult Social Services as many more people are likely to need care and support. There are over 20,000 unpaid carers locally (the highest proportion across Wales) and this figure is set to increase, we need to ensure that carers have access to the right information and support.

What difference do we want to make?

Our vision is to deliver adult social care that minimises dependency and enables people to live as independently as possible within their own homes and communities.

Our aim is to achieve this vision by meeting the needs of people requiring care and support in a way that is person centred, fair, cost effective, of high quality and also sustainable.

What are we going to do in the next 12 months?

We will:

- Deliver on proposals for a new range of services for people with disabilities, which will cater for individuals with assessed needs in relation to physical disabilities, learning disabilities and mental health. This will focus on three discrete elements – a community independence service, an employment service and a care and support service;
- Modernise social work practice to ensure we meet or exceed practice standards in terms of timeliness of response and quality, and implement the safeguarding action plan to further improve safeguarding practices;
- Continue to prevent homelessness by maintaining the high percentage of all potentially homeless households which were prevented from becoming homeless for at least six months; and
- Improve residents' ability to remain independent in their own homes by providing support and continuing to offer Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) for adaptations to houses to meet the needs of disabled residents and we aim to reduce the average time to complete a DFG to 225 days.

In partnership, we will:

- Work with the ABMU Health Board, Neath Port Talbot Carers Service, Carer representatives, Third Sector organisations and others to develop a commissioning strategy focusing on services which support carers in Neath Port Talbot. The strategy will help us plan how we use the money available in a way which achieves the best outcomes for unpaid carers;
- Implement an approach called 'Pathways to Independence' across community care to ensure adults of working age with care and support needs are assessed and supported in a way which maximises their independence and more people are living independently with minimal or no support in their own communities;
- Work with neighbouring authorities and the ABMU Health Board as part of the Western Bay Programme to ensure services are integrated. Work will focus on community services for frail older people, those with learning disabilities and adult mental health services;
- Develop and implement a Multi Agency Transition Policy and protocol to ensure all young people receive high quality advice, information and support to enable them to plan for their future as they move into adulthood;
- Open the first (of the four) new 60 bed residential care home delivered by Grŵp Gwalia in the summer of 2014, situated in Moor Road, Port Talbot; and

- Increase the availability of good quality, well managed, affordable private sector accommodation via the Social Lettings Agency to address the future changes in homelessness legislation and work to have 100 tenancies in management by the end of 2014-2015.

Link to Single Integrated Plan:

The above improvements link to the cross cutting priorities listed on page 6 and 7 in the [Single Integrated Plan](#) for Children and Young People and Health Inequities.

Where you can get more information:

- Corporate Improvement Plan Delivery Programme gives more information on how we will deliver the above priorities.
- [Connecting People and Communities: A Social Care Policy for Transforming Social Care in Neath Port Talbot 2013 – 2018](#)
- [NPT Community Meals Policy](#) (1st April 2014)
- [NPT Charging and Financial Assessment Policy for Non-residential Forms of Care](#)
- Council Website: [Transforming Adult Social Care](#)

IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 4

Support and invest in our town centres and communities to promote economic growth, regeneration and sustainability, maximise job opportunities and improve access to employment

Why is this important?

Our town centres and communities are important and vital aspects of Neath Port Talbot.

However, the contraction of traditional industry in the area has impacted on the economic growth of Neath Port Talbot and the economic downturn has frustrated our regeneration programmes. These extremely difficult economic times have made it more difficult for local businesses to create new jobs.

Issues with transport and access between rural and urban areas adversely affect the ability of people from some communities to take advantage of employment opportunities.

It is also important over the course of this Plan to reduce the impact of the UK Government's welfare reforms, in some cases several of the reforms are likely to impact at the same time on the same households and/or individuals. Neath Port Talbot is listed the tenth worst affected Local Authority (across England and Wales) to be affected by the reforms by 2014-2015.

What difference do we want to make?

Our response to the economic downturn has been to continue to put in place projects that will help us to be in a strong position to take our plans forward once economic circumstances change. For example, a strategy for the regeneration of the Waterfront has been agreed by the Council which includes plans for Port Talbot Town Centre and the Docks area. These plans set a clear framework for the future development of these important areas of the County Borough.

Plans are in place for the continued regeneration of Neath and Port Talbot Town Centres, with specific projects underway to protect and enhance the vitality and vibrancy of these important towns. The forthcoming Vibrant & Viable Places

programme in Port Talbot will help us deliver an important housing element within the regeneration of the Town Centre. All of this work will help the private sector to identify development opportunities as the economic position improves, as well as enabling the Council to seek grant funding and other support.

A strong local economy relies heavily on an effective transport system. People need to be able to travel easily to their place of work. We are working to reduce traffic congestion and the completion of Harbour Way and the development of a commuter cycle network will improve access to town and employment centres.

We cannot tackle the challenge of economic growth alone. We will continue to play a leading role in the development of the City Region, and consider ways in which Neath Port Talbot can benefit from future Welsh Government regeneration programmes. We need to harness the knowledge and commitment of the private sector, to support growth and employment opportunities for local people. This includes the development of key sites and premises including Coed Darcy Urban Village, Harbourside and the new Swansea University Bay Campus.

We will continue to maximise community benefit from Council, Welsh Government and private sector investment in the County Borough to support job creation, apprenticeships and supply chain opportunities for local companies.

We will work closely with our partners to support those families on low incomes, who are most affected by the impact of the welfare reform changes.

What are we going to do in the next 12 months?

Regeneration, we will:

- Continue work on Harbourside by developing pedestrian links to improve accessibility to employment opportunities;
- Begin work on the Baglan Link Bridge which will make Baglan Energy Park more accessible and enable local bus companies to provide a bus service to the site;
- Begin construction work to deliver the first phase of the Neath Town Centre redevelopment to improve the town centre for the community and visitors to the town;
- Complete improvements in public areas in Port Talbot, Neath and Croeserw to enhance the environment for the community;
- Begin construction work, on the new Leisure Centre on Aberavon seafront;

- Continue to drive forward regeneration projects in the Valleys to make enhancements to tourism, employment and public areas;
- Develop a comprehensive commuter cycle network to enable residents and visitors to access towns, employment centres and visitor attractions effectively and safely;
- Pursue the establishment of quality tourist accommodation and facilities at sites including Rheola; and
- Continue to renovate properties in the Council's two Renewal Areas- Neath East and Sandfields East & Aberavon. We aim to improve 75 properties.

Employment & Prosperity we will:

- Continue to work with Welsh Government to test and explore opportunities to reduce the number of individuals in South West Wales who are economically inactive or unemployed by working in a joined up, client centred way;
- Help economically inactive people and those who are long-term unemployed to improve their chances of getting a job through the Workways project and to explore self-employment through the Council's Innov8 programme;
- Provide an effective and supportive service through our Business Development Team to local businesses to help them prosper creating more jobs and business start ups;
- Identify contracts for local companies and job and training opportunities for local people within major developments in the County Borough; and
- Provide opportunities for accessing training and employment, and support for businesses, in the community at the Croeserw Enterprise Centre.

In partnership, we will:

- Continue to monitor progress made by NPT Homes to ensure they meet the Council's promise to bring all former council housing up to the Welsh Housing Quality Standard and to regenerate communities;
- Continue to offer the "Housing to Homes" interest free loans to encourage landlords, developers and home owners to renovate empty houses that have fallen into disrepair and aim to support ten homes to be available for use;
- Work with our housing partners to deliver affordable housing, through the Social Housing Grant (including Smaller Properties programme and revenue funded schemes), Vibrant & Viable Places programme and the Welsh Housing Partnership; whilst continuing to explore other and innovative funding solutions;
- Develop projects and programmes to maximise the impact of the next round of European Funding;

- Prioritise the allocation of Discretionary Housing Payment Grants to those in greatest need to prevent hardship;
 - Continue to fund benefits advice services, including maintaining the Council's Welfare Rights Unit, so that people are accessing the benefits to which they are entitled;
 - Complete the three pilot projects that we have set up with the assistance of European funding, to improve access to advice and support services for people with low incomes and recommend next steps to the Local Service Board:
- **Project one** - the Multi Agency Hub at Pontardawe;
 - **Project two** - the dedicated advice line we have set up in the Council's Corporate Contact Centre; and
 - **Project three** - one stop help for people actively seeking work through joint working between the library service and the Jobcentre.
- Deliver on the Strategic Aims of the Regional Economic Development Strategy to enhance the long-term prospects of our City Region economy, its businesses and communities and monitor the delivery via a newly developed performance management framework;
 - Work towards linking strategic employment sites by establishing priority bus corridors between key towns within the City Region;
 - Work with community transport operators to enhance and integrate their services to support local communities and ensure the schemes meet the transport targets as set out in the Service Level Agreements with the Council;
 - Redevelop Port Talbot Parkway Station, to improve access, parking and facilities for customers;
 - Implement the Vibrant and Viable Places Regeneration Framework to combine support for people and places, and encourage partnership working by the public, private and third sector;
 - Develop key sites and premises across the County Borough to encourage economic growth. Sites include: Harbourside, Coed Darcy Urban Village and Swansea University's new Bay Campus;
 - Enable the establishment of caravan site facilities at Margam Park in partnership with the Camping and Caravanning Club to enhance visitor numbers to the County Borough; and
 - Make the most of community investment by working in partnership with developers/organisations who are delivering substantial investment programmes, to encourage and monitor training and job opportunities for local people, and local supply chain activity.

Link to Single Integrated Plan:

The above improvements link to the cross cutting priority listed on page 6 and 7 in the [Single Integrated Plan](#) for Anti-poverty and Transport.

Where you can get more information:

- Corporate Improvement Plan Delivery Programme gives more information on how we will deliver the above priorities.
- Please visit www.npt-business.co.uk



IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 5

Increase the percentage of waste recycled and composted

Why is this important?

The Welsh Government set very challenging statutory targets for reuse/recycling and composting in the Waste Strategy 'Towards Zero Waste'. If we do not meet these targets we could attract potential fines of £200 per tonne. We are working towards achieving the 2015-2016 statutory target of 58%.

The Council is already operating an extensive weekly kerbside recycling service where we collect a range of different materials including paper, card, cans, textiles, glass, food waste and garden waste. Recyclable plastic is also collected but on a fortnightly basis, alongside refuse collections. Whilst many households are recycling large quantities of waste, some are not.

To help households recycle as much as possible we are going to make further changes to the way we collect waste, which will include reducing the size of wheelie bins and plans to pilot a kerbside sort recycling service in some areas of the County Borough in 2014. We will implement the Welsh Government Collections Blueprint as far as possible, meeting local needs and operating with available resources.

In collaboration with Councils in South West Wales for regional waste treatment, we will commence with the treatment of food waste by anaerobic digestion, which means composting food waste to produce energy and fertilizer. The fertilizer can be used to improve agricultural land.

We will introduce specific enforcement of commercial waste to ensure all businesses comply with legislation and to prevent unauthorised collection of commercial waste by the Council.

We also want to increase the level of recycling amongst Council staff, 72% of whom are resident in Neath Port Talbot. This is to encourage good recycling behaviour at work and at home.

What difference do we want to make?

We will change the way we collect waste because we want to encourage residents and businesses to recycle and compost more. This will help us meet statutory recycling targets, improve our performance, manage our resources better and improve the environment.

What are we going to do in the next 12 months?

We will:

- Progress with the implementation of the Council's Waste Strategy to increase recycling and composting to achieve statutory recycling targets. We aim to increase our rates to 55% and work towards achieving the 2015-2016 statutory target of 58% (which is currently 52%);
- Implement the Council's communications and engagement plan to improve public participation by undertaking surveys to identify areas of low participation and prioritise efforts to increase participation in these areas;
- Introduce a phased roll out 'Kerbside Sort' recycling waste collection service in 2014-2015, to all accessible areas of the County Borough;
- Continue the introduction of smaller wheelie bins, prioritising the areas that have low recycling participation;
- Introduce specific enforcement of commercial waste, to ensure all businesses comply with legislation by writing to all businesses. We will ensure they have valid trade waste agreements, take action against businesses that do not and undertake ad hoc inspections to ensure that businesses are presenting appropriate waste in line with their agreements (trade waste agreements with the Council only); and
- Increase the level of waste recycled by council staff in the three main centres namely Neath Civic Centre, Port Talbot Civic Centre and The Quays by increasing the recycling provision available, offering food waste recycling provision and rationalisation of 'general' waste bins.

In partnership, we will:

- Continue to participate in procurement of the regional treatment of food waste through Anaerobic Digestion (conversion of food waste into energy and fertilizer) which will contribute to the Council achieving statutory recycling targets.

Where you can get more information:

- Corporate Improvement Plan Delivery Programme gives more information on how we will deliver the above priorities.
- [Waste Strategy Review](#) Cabinet (24th April 2013)



IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVE 6

To improve customer/citizen access to services and functions provided by the Council or on behalf of the Council and to improve the efficiency of those services and functions

Why is this important?

The transformation of our services and internal management and administrative processes is essential to helping the Council deliver good quality services, especially at a time when we have a significant additional financial savings target to meet in 2014-2015, whilst protecting jobs to the maximum extent possible.

What difference do we want to make?

We will continue to review our services to make sure we get it right first time in order to cut out unnecessary processes, where there are high levels of preventable demand, so customers experience a more efficient service and it's simpler for staff to deliver. We will ensure we are making the best use of modern technology for people to access services on-line at a time convenient to them and to improve our customer response times. We will continue with our programme to review the Council's major management and administrative processes to remove unnecessary bureaucracy from our corporate systems, improve business intelligence through better exploitation of the data that we hold and ensure that corporate systems enable good corporate governance. We also want to continue our focus to further reduce sickness absence levels across the Council.

In turn these changes will help us reduce the cost of services and help us make the financial savings we must make to achieve a balanced budget.

What are we going to do in the next 12 months?

We will:

- Continue with a programme of efficiency reviews, using our Systems Thinking approach, and prioritising services where we receive most complaints;
- Modernise and improve on-line transactions available to the public and increase the number of on-line transactions undertaken;
- Improve our telephone response times in our corporate Contact Centre (main switchboard) and reduce the number of abandoned calls;
- Continue the work we started last year to transform our internal management and administrative processes. Once complete we expect to reduce the cost of administration associated with these processes and have much improved management information available to inform our future improvement plans. In the next 12 months we expect to have made progress as follows:
 - By March 2015 all services will be using the new procure to pay system;
 - Staff currently receiving pay on a fortnightly basis will be moved to monthly pay; and
 - The Council's staffing data will have been audited and we will have new systems in place that make it easier to keep records up to date and report on that information for management purposes. A new, improved absence management module will be developed. This will help managers continue to maximise the attendance of staff at work and reduce sickness absence levels by at least 5% on 2013-2014 levels; and we will
- Implement a revised corporate performance management framework which will support continuous improvement and employee development across the Council's services and functions.

In partnership, we will:

- Implement the recommendations from the review of funding provided by the Council to Third Sector organisations, which will include the development of a new grant making policy to encourage organisations to work towards achieving financial sustainability and the building of capacity across the sector locally.

Where you can get more information:

- Corporate Improvement Plan Delivery Programme gives more information on how we will deliver the above priorities.

Section 7 How we will secure Continuous Improvement

The Council has a general duty under the Measure to ‘make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions’. To achieve this, we have to ensure we have the right skills, capacity and governance in place. The Council has taken deliberate steps to make sure that this is the case and this section describes the work we have done and will continue to do.

a) Planning for improvement

Generally there are four steps in our planning framework. The first is to identify objectives for improvement; the second is to finalise our objectives and set out our plans for delivery during the forthcoming year; third is to monitor performance throughout the whole year; and finally to review that progress, so that we can go back to step one and refine our objectives for the following year.

During 2013-2014, we have undertaken reviews of our key plans and further integrated our key planning activities. The outcomes of this are:

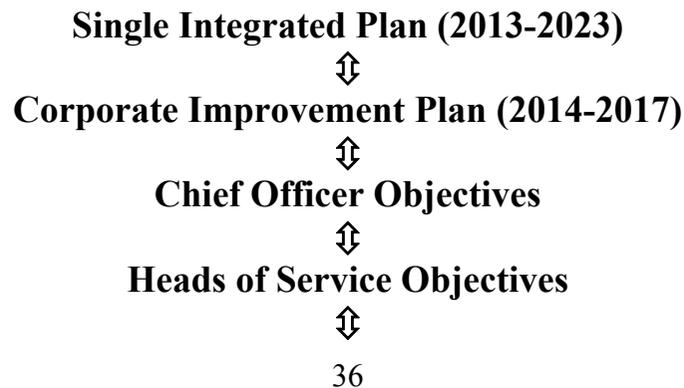
- **Improvement objectives** – we reviewed our improvement objectives to ensure we continue to build on the good progress made to date and to ensure there is sharper focus on the objectives taking account of the very challenging financial situation we face;
- **Single Integrated Plan** – with our partners we reviewed our priorities within the Single Integrated Plan. These were set last year and remain very relevant; and partners have agreed the focus for action in the next 12 month period;
- **FFP** – we revised the FFP to achieve a balanced budget in line with the significantly reduced settlement we received from Welsh Government. This included reducing our workforce through our ER/VR scheme;
- **Asset Management** – we reviewed a number of our asset plans to ensure that they inform and are informed by our corporate priorities and connected to our revenue and capital budgets. These included asset plans for Property, Vehicle and Highways. The asset plan for IT is being updated;
- **Transformation programme** – we reviewed our Transformation programme agenda taking account of the financial crisis and now have a more focused programme. The agenda now reflects more service led changes and each improvement objective has sufficient resources dedicated to deliver the work; and

- **Performance Management Framework** – we reviewed our performance management arrangements to improve our business planning arrangements and strengthen the Council’s corporate performance management framework (more detail in part b below).

While this Plan sets out the Council’s improvement priorities, the Council continues to be committed to continuous improvement of all its functions. Continuous improvement activity is delivered within a framework of business and service plans.

b) Implementing improvement actions

Performance management – to strengthen arrangements to secure continuous improvement during 2013-2014, we undertook a review of our performance management arrangements. A dedicated officer led the review along with an independent, external ‘critical friend’, funded by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA), and high level support at chief officer level. Following the review, a revised Council-wide corporate performance management framework was agreed and is now being implemented. This includes a revised business planning framework at head of service level, the development of performance scorecards at operational management level and a revised appraisal framework for chief officers and heads of service, plus stronger emphasis on completing employee development reviews under the existing scheme for all other employees. This will improve the availability of performance information and strengthen accountability across the Council (e.g. people, financial and service activity). This work will also better align performance and financial information to support and challenge improvement at a service level. This is how it will look:



Heads of Service Business Plans



Service Report Cards



Employee Development Reviews

During the last 12 months, Members have had the opportunity to improve the way they scrutinise performance and have an impact upon the decision making process whereby they add value. Some of the examples include establishing a Members' Panel for Children's Services and a Member task and finish group to consider complaints received for the Environment Directorate.

During 2014-2015, an evaluation will be undertaken of the revised framework to ensure it is 'fit for purpose' and any necessary amendments will be actioned before the 2015-2016 planning cycle is initiated.

Workforce Capacity and Skills – delivery of the Council's FFP and improvement objectives requires the right number of people with the right skills in the right place doing the right things. In other words, the Council needs to maximise the performance of everyone within our workforce, whilst also recognising that the Council's workforce is shrinking as it goes through phase after phase of downsizing and transformation.

There is a constant tension between the number of people employed by the Council and the total cost of the Council's pay bill. An ongoing challenge for the Council and its trade unions is to identify and implement an optimum workforce solution which protects the Council's employees against compulsory redundancy to the greatest extent possible, whilst also protecting employees' pay and conditions of service to the greatest extent possible.

In practice, a compromise solution has been achieved. Employees and trade unions have worked in social partnership with senior managers and Elected Members to agree two cost reduction Workforce Strategies - in 2011 and 2013 - which have resulted in many employees within the Council's workforce agreeing to sacrifice, sometimes temporarily and sometimes permanently, elements of their pay and conditions so that their jobs can be protected. In conjunction with two major voluntary redundancy programmes, these measures have resulted in no compulsory redundancies arising in 2013-2014 as a direct result of the Council making £17.3 million of FFP related savings.

An assessment has been made of the key service level and Council-wide priorities in 2014-2015 which have workforce implications and an agreed work programme has been developed for the Council's Human Resources (HR) team which seeks to balance a further significant downsizing of the HR team's staffing resources, the need for the Council (and all of its schools) to have suitable and competent HR support to enable it to work safely and effectively in workforce terms and also the requirement for all service managers and head teachers to successfully deliver their respective budget-related and Improvement Objectives.

Increasingly, the Council's collaboration activities are resulting in the need for its workforce activities to be joined up across local and regional boundaries, increasing the complexities involved.

c) Monitoring and Evaluating Improvement

To ensure we are on track to deliver our priorities for improvement, we will continue to use the mechanisms we have in place to monitor their delivery, these include:

- **Monthly highlight reports** prepared for each programme of work that has been established to achieve the six improvement objectives. The highlight reports contain information on achievements, risks, budget position, benefits tracking and the work to be completed during the next phase. These highlight reports are scrutinised by the Corporate Directors' Group who act as the over-arching programme board;
- **Quarterly budget and Forward Financial Plan** monitoring reports submitted to the Council, Chief Officers and scrutiny committees;
- **Half yearly progress report (1st April to 30th September)** submitted to the Council's scrutiny committees on the actions and measures identified which demonstrate the progress made in delivering the priorities; and
- **Annual Report** published in October which contains an assessment of the Council's overall performance in the previous financial year including progress made against our improvement objectives in the previous year.

We maintain a risk register for the Transformation Programme which is informed by the monthly highlight reports for the improvement objectives as mentioned above and which is in accordance with the Council's Risk Management Policy.

d) Governance for Continuous Improvement

Governance is about the way the Council ensures that we are doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. Good governance leads to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and ultimately good outcomes for our citizens and service users.

We are committed to ensuring that we openly consider and improve our governance arrangements as we deliver our priorities for improvement. The Governance Group established in 2010-2011 has met regularly throughout the year to oversee the Council's governance functions. Last year the Group put a comprehensive forward work programme together to manage the governance issues identified in the Council's Annual Governance Statement (2012-2013), a document which all councils in Wales are required to produce on an annual basis.

The main areas included in the forward work programme are listed below together with an indication of progress for each:

- Council's Performance Management Framework and Performance Appraisal Framework – detail already provided in this section under 'Performance Management';
- Democratic Services – a review was undertaken last year of the democratic process to assess if the arrangements were still fit for purpose. The review has proposed strengthening democratic arrangements in respect of scrutiny, executive, collaboration and partnership, member development, and administration functions. Some of the improvements identified include: ensuring the roles and responsibilities of scrutiny committees are further developed; a more consistent approach to the development of forward work programmes is in place across all committees; the democratic oversight of collaboration activities is strengthened; better coordination of member development and support opportunities; and implementing a replacement committee administration system (Moderngov);
- Future Generations Bill – detail already provided in Section 8 under 'Sustainability';
- Corporate Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy – a 2 stage policy has been implemented to replace what was previously a 3 stage policy. We will also start to apply a more consistent approach to the reporting of this type of feedback across the Council;

- Corporate Risk Management Policy – Due to a change in personnel, the lead officer responsible for this was not replaced and as a result the work slipped to keep the corporate risk register maintained. The Council has identified that this policy has not been fully implemented and is a risk area. Steps are in place to address this issue and it has been included in the Governance Group’s forward work programme for 2014-2015;
- Regional and Local Collaboration – detail provided in Section 8 under ‘Partnership Working/Collaboration’; and
- Childrens and Young People Services – detail provided in Improvement Objective 1.

We have also taken on board feedback from the WAO’s improvement study on ‘Local Authority Reviews of Governance’, for which the key learning points included: no real comprehensive training in place for staff and Members on governance issues; consideration of governance arrangements is not fully embedded in the process for the rationalisation of partnerships; processes with supporting evidence are not available to demonstrate whether specific governance arrangements are being delivered satisfactorily; and in the absence of support and contact with services, council wide development of governance will not be comprehensively ‘owned’ by all services.

This feedback will form part of our learning and improving cycle to support continuous improvement. The detail of how we are responding to this feedback has been included in the forward work programme of the Governance Group and will be included in our Annual Governance Statement for 2013-2014. We have taken the opportunity to improve the Annual Governance Statement for 2013-2014 by streamlining it and ensuring it is more analytical rather than descriptive.

e) Benchmarking (compare and share)

We will continue to share and compare our performance information with partners, other councils and key stakeholders to improve services across the Council. For example, we may visit other councils to learn from their best practice and host visits for other councils to share our best practice. We will also compare our performance with other councils through benchmarking groups. In addition, each year we will undertake an assessment of our nationally reported performance indicators, so that we have an understanding of our performance, and how we match up with our peers to see if we are doing well or not across these key measures. This information will be included each year in our Annual Report and reported to Members.

Where you can get more information:

- [Link to HR Workforce Strategy 2013](#)
- [Link to Annual Governance Statement](#)
- [Progress report reviewing the Council's Corporate Performance Management Framework \(27th March 2014\)](#)

Section 8 Underpinning Principles

a) Equalities

At the time of development in 2011-2012 the equality objectives included in the Strategic Equality Plan (SEP) were aligned with the then Plan's priorities ('Doing What Matters' 2012-2015). Since then we have refreshed our improvement objectives but our equality objectives have remained unchanged because they continue to be relevant. By the autumn of 2014, we will have identified which measures / indicators included under each improvement objective relate directly/indirectly to equality objectives. Also during 2014-2015, we will start to review our equality objectives taking into account people's needs and requirements, our resources, and our partner's resources as well as any external pressures being placed upon local government.

We will include details of the progress we have made against the equality objectives for the previous year (2012-2013) in our SEP Annual Report for this period (published 27th March 2014).

Last year we carried out a number of EIA training sessions with the assistance of external support from the Welsh Local Government Association. The sessions were mainly for those individuals involved in the recent budget savings exercise and undertaking EIAs. These included: Executive Board Members; Chairs and Vice Chairs of Scrutiny committees; and those who support the committee process (including Scrutiny Officers). The aim of the training was to increase understanding across the various groups to ensure EIAs were undertaken and scrutinised more strongly than in previous years.

As a result of the training, the decision making process has been strengthened and decisions are being taken in the knowledge that the EIA has been explored and where appropriate, actions to lessen the impact have been identified and acted upon. For example, following an EIA on the proposed changes in the Home to School Transport Policy a number of amendments were made to lessen the impact on families. These included:

- The original proposal was to make changes in transport at the end of year 2 (Infants) and also at the end of year 6 (Juniors) but instead this was amended to take affect at the end of the primary school year (year 6); and
- The original annual charge for post 16 students to use transport was £270 but this was reduced to £100.

The other example where we have seen the benefits of the training were in our recent Library Review. As a result of the assessment and consultation process, alternative methods for service delivery were suggested to the original review report. These were: a rescheduled Mobile Library service; enhanced home delivery service; relocation of existing libraries; deposit collections; volunteer run libraries, community run libraries/library trusts; and partnerships with Community Councils.

The link between our equality and the regional community cohesion objectives agreed by the Welsh Government will be reviewed during 2014-2015. During 2013-2014, in conjunction with our Regional Community Cohesion Co-ordinator we have focused upon improving awareness of hate crime and this work will continue during 2014-2015.

b) Welsh Language

The Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011 provided a legislative basis to produce “standards of conduct” in relation to the use of the Welsh language and that it should be treated no less favourably than the English language. The first set of Standards was published by the Welsh Government on 6th January 2014.

These proposed Standards are being used as the basis for a standards investigation with Local Authorities, National Parks and Welsh Ministers. Key findings from the investigation (due to finish in April 2014), will be reported to the Welsh Government and will contribute to the work of preparing Regulations to make Standards, which are likely to come into force in November 2014.

The publication of these proposed Standards is an important step in fulfilling the Welsh Government’s vision (as stated in the Welsh language strategy) to improve Welsh language services to citizens. The Welsh Government wishes to ensure that the operational standards also provide a platform especially for public sector organisations, to increase opportunities for people to use Welsh in the workplace.

The implementation of the new Standards is going to be difficult to achieve because substantial additional resources will be required during a period of austerity. Without additional resources, we will have to continue to focus on those actions we can progress using existing resources.

While, the work on the new Standards is underway we remain committed to the equal status of English and Welsh in the conduct of business in Wales. Our Welsh Language Scheme confirms this commitment.

Our current priorities include:

- Consideration of Welsh language service provision for Children and Young People;
- Review of notices for individuals;
- Contracting out public service contracts and the Welsh language;
- Assessment of linguistic skills as part of the recruitment process;
- Increasing Welsh language awareness; and
- Improving our website compliance.

Progress in implementing our priorities will be reported as part of the Annual Monitoring Report to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

c) Sustainability

We aim to promote sustainable development wherever possible, both in our day to day business and in supporting projects that address social, economic and environmental considerations simultaneously. This helps raise awareness of the importance of what will become a future requirement, that the decisions we make today do not have an unfair impact on future generations.

Many of our improvement objectives help show our commitment to sustainability. For example, we are committed to managing our waste to avoid additional costs and environmental impacts for future generations. Our new builds which we commission are required to meet high environmental standards, which includes taking into account the various impacts and the views of stakeholders. The work we do to promote economic growth also supports sustainable development because better employment and training opportunities improves the economic and social wellbeing of communities.

The intention of the Future Generation Bill is to make sustainable development the centre of all activities and decisions of public bodies. In preparation for the new duty, during 2014-2015, we are producing a Sustainable Development Policy and Action Plan, which will be reported upon annually. This work to embed sustainable development as a central organising principle will include reviewing our impact assessment tools which we use in relation to new policies and decisions.

d) Citizen Engagement

We aim to be an open and responsive Council that encourages those who use our services to tell us what is important to them and to suggest how services might improve using a variety of tools such as social media, our website and email. As part of our community leadership role, we are committed to working in partnership to protect and improve local services and support our communities. It's important to us that our citizens have a voice to influence the development of policies and strategies that affect their lives and inform the way services are planned and delivered. However, due to the complexity of the differing needs of citizens it is not always possible to meet all needs, but a good understanding means we are better placed to divert valuable resource into the right places, at the right times and in the right ways.

We have had a number of consultations running throughout the year on our website (<http://www.npt.gov.uk/haveyoursay>) some of which include: proposed changes to our Community Meals Policy; Charging Policy (for adult social care); Transport Policy; New Model for Modernising Day Services (Pan Disability) and Modernising Day Services (Older People).

The groups we engage with are very diverse and are at different stages of development. Examples include:

- The Youth Council which is now a fully elected youth forum that covers the County Borough; the OPC which is considering the improvement priorities when developing their own priorities for action;
- The Older Persons' Consultation Forum which consists of representatives from organisations who are working to improve services for older people;
- The BME Forum, which has made a good start in reviewing their priorities for action with community representatives;
- The DPAG which advises the Council about the impact its facilities and services can have on disability issues; and
- The DNAG whose members have direct experience of disability issues, offer to meet with service providers to help them address the needs of people with disabilities and the Council has benefited from their advice on how to improve some services.

Last year we developed an overarching Communications and Engagement Plan for the Council's 'Rising to the Challenge' transformation programme and each of the six programmes had their own communications and engagement plans. The aim of the plans was to ensure that communication and engagement activities in relation to 'Rising to the Challenge' were joined

up, consistent and timely, and all stakeholders received information and engaged with the programme in ways most appropriate to them.

To date there has been much progress in implementing the above and the following activities are just a few examples of what we have delivered:

- Our intranet site (which is the Council's internal communication network) was re-branded to launch and publish the six improvement objectives to raise corporate wide awareness;
- Regular (monthly) feature stories on the six improvement objectives are included in the internal e newsletter called 'In the Loop' to target employees (of which 72% reside in the County Borough);
- A series of Chat with the Chief sessions were held with staff to explain the FFP and its implications;
- Mobile exhibition to promote the improvement objectives/'What can I do?' were displayed within the main civic buildings to raise awareness with the public;
- A number of presentations were given to organisations/equalities groups within Neath Port Talbot. Last year Senior Officers from the Council attended two meetings with the OPC to brief them on the Council's improvement objectives and they commented how useful the engagement activity had been; and
- 'Rising to the Challenge' posters were printed and displayed throughout civic buildings and on public TV display screens.

e) Partnership Working/Collaboration

During 2013-2014 we reviewed the terms of reference, membership and wider governance arrangements of the Local Service Board to ensure they are effective in delivering the Single Integrated Plan and a revised model is now in place. We also revisited and updated the terms of reference for the Children and Young People Partnership. In 2014-2015 we will review the terms of reference and membership of the Community Safety Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Partnerships. The governance arrangements for regional collaboration will also be subject of review in 2014-2015.

Scrutiny work programmes will include a focus on Local Service Board cross cutting themes and there will be greater member involvement on partnership boards (both executive and scrutiny).

We have also, under each improvement objective, separate partnership work streams to clearly show how these will contribute to achievement of our improvement objectives.

Where you can get more information:

- Strategic Equality Plan Annual Report 2012-2013: www.npt.gov.uk/annualreport201213
- Welsh Language Commissioner
- [Future Generations Bill: Better Choices for a Better Future](#)
- Consultation and engagement events at: <http://www.npt.gov.uk/haveyoursay>
- [Regional Collaboration Compendium](#) collated by the Welsh Local Government Association

Section 9 What our Regulators have said

a) Wales Audit Office

Under the 2009 Measure, the Auditor General for Wales (AGW) is required to report annually on his audit and assessment work in relation to whether the Council has discharged its duties and has met the requirements of the 2009 Measure.

The first output of this work for 2013-2014 is contained in the AGW's [first Improvement Assessment Letter](#) which concentrated on whether the Council had discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning. The focus of this work was the contents of the Council's Corporate Plan "Rising to the Challenge" for the period 2013-2016.

The AGW reported the following main findings:

- The Council has discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure and has established improvement objectives for 2013-2014;
- The Council is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement during the financial year 2013-2014;
- The Council recognises the financial challenges it faces and has appropriate arrangements in place to manage them;
- Of the six proposals for improvement identified in the previous assessments, five have been addressed or it is acknowledged that action is being taken to address them and one has not been addressed; and
- The Council needs to address two further proposals for improvement. The first proposes potential improvement to the content and publication arrangements of the Corporate Improvement Plan. The second was made to draw attention to the lack of progress in recent years to the establishment of a staff appraisal system.

The second output of this work is contained in the AGW's [second Improvement Assessment Letter](#) which concentrated on whether the Council had discharged its statutory duties in respect of reporting on performance. The focus of this work was the Council's Annual Report for the period 2012-2013. The AGW concluded the Council has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure by publishing this Report by the deadline of 31st October 2013.

However, the AGW commented there is potential for the Council to strengthen its arrangements further by consistently explaining whether or not collaboration has achieved intended outcomes; and making it clear in the Report how the Council raises awareness of citizens and communities about the availability of the Report.

These comments have been taken on board and our response will be included in our Annual Report for 2014-2015. The AGW did not suggest any new proposals for improvement but will be continuing to monitor and report on progress made by the Council in implementing the proposals set out in previous reports and letters.

The culmination of the AGW's audit and assessment work during 2013-2014 will be contained within the AGW's **Annual Improvement Report (AIR)**. The AIR was not available at the time of producing this Plan; therefore the findings will be reported in the Council's Annual Report 2013-2014 to be published in October 2014.

Corporate Assessment

In addition to an annual programme of improvement as listed above, the AGW will also be undertaking a Corporate Assessment (CA) on the Council during the summer of 2014. The AGW states that the purpose of the CA is to provide a position statement of an improvement authority's capacity and capability to deliver continuous improvement. The CA will examine, in-depth the authority's track record of performance and outcomes and also the key arrangements that are necessary to underpin improvements in services and functions. The Council has made arrangements to carry out preparatory work before the CA commences through workshops with senior officers and in liaison with the Wales Audit Office. The AGW will issue a report that states whether he believes that the Council is likely to comply with the requirements of the 2009 Measure on completion of the assessment later this year.

b) Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSiW)

Key findings from the inspection of the Council's CYPS, which took place in November 2013 to find out if sufficient progress has been made to improve the quality and consistency of services for children and young people, were:

- Since the last inspection significant progress has been made to strengthen the management team who have a clear direction to take forward the improvement agenda;
- There has been strong political and corporate support for the improvement agenda;
- There has been effective prioritisation of the actions set out in the improvement plan; and

- Despite the significant amount of work which has been carried out this has not as yet resulted in consistent improvement in performance and quality across the planning and delivery of children’s services.

The findings from the report have been incorporated into improvement objective one.

c) Estyn

During 2013, 13 of our schools were inspected by Estyn, who provided an overall assessment on each school based on current performance (1) and prospects for improvement (2). The results were as follows:

- 8 schools assessed as Good (1) & Good (2), of which 2 required some local authority monitoring;
- 2 schools assessed as Good (1) & Adequate and required further monitoring by Estyn. If an inspection team judges that a school has some important areas for improvement, then Estyn will monitor the school at a later stage which is usually a year to 18 months later. Inspectors judge whether the school has improved enough to be removed from the list or whether it needs to be identified as requiring significant improvement or special measures;
- 2 schools assessed as Adequate (1) & Good (2) and required further monitoring by Estyn; and
- 1 school assessed as Adequate & Unsatisfactory (2) and required Significant Improvement. If inspectors judge that a school is performing significantly less well than expected, Estyn place it on the list of schools requiring significant improvement and the Council informs the Welsh Government. A team of inspectors returns to the school approximately a year later to find out how well the school has progressed. If progress is poor, the school may be placed into special measures.

d) Other audits

During 2013-2014 the Council was audited by the Information Commission Officer (ICO). The purpose of the audit was to provide the Information Commissioner and the Council with an independent assurance of the extent to which the Council within the scope of the audit was complying with the Data Protection Act. The ICO report was reported to scrutiny committee on 27th March 2014.

The overall findings of the Audit are ones of “limited assurance”. Of the various grades of outcome this is the third out of four. The Council specifically asked the ICO to look at areas where we were conscious that improvement was necessary; rather than to look at areas where we were confident that we were performing well (e.g. Data Security). Learning from the

audit will be reflected in our forward planning arrangements. Following the audit undertaken by the ICO the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee/Board endorsed a recommendation that data protection issues be added to the remit of the Governance Group.

Where you can get more information:

- The Wales Audit Office reports can be found on their website at <https://www.wao.gov.uk/>
- The full CSSiW report can be found at: [Inspection of Children's Social Services Neath Port Talbot 2013](#)
- School inspection reports can be found on the [Estyn website](#)
- [Data Protection Audit Report](#) (Policy and Resources Cabinet Board, 27th March 2014)

Section 10 Have your say on what matters to you

We are committed to understanding and responding to the local needs and priorities of our citizens and other stakeholders.

If you would like to submit any views or comments on this Corporate Improvement Plan or on future priorities for improvement the Council should consider when planning and delivering services, please send them to the Chief Executive, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, Civic Centre, Port Talbot, SA13 1PJ or email them to:

improvement@npt.gov.uk

During the year, we have a number of consultation/engagement events about various services which we promote in the press, on the website and which you can access via the following link:

<http://www.npt.gov.uk/haveyoursay>



Visit the Council's website: www.npt.gov.uk



Follow us and add your comments to the Council's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/NeathPortTalbotCBC>



Follow this report and add your Tweets on our Twitter Page: @NPTCouncil

In order to be sustainable and to reduce printing costs, a hard copy of this Plan and the Delivery Programme is available at these locations: Neath One Stop Shop, Civic Centre, Neath SA11 3QZ; Port Talbot Civic Centre, Port Talbot SA13 1PJ; and Pontardawe Library, Holly Street, Pontardawe, SA8 4ET.

If you require this information in larger print or in an alternative format, please contact the Corporate Strategy Team on 01639 763677 or email improvement@npt.gov.uk

Section 11 Glossary – below is a glossary of some of the terminology used in this Plan.

Affordable housing	Any housing (e.g. for rent, for purchase, or for part rent, part purchase) that is available at less than market rates.
Annual Report	The Annual Report gives a ‘backward look’, accounting for our overall performance during the last financial year.
Budget	The money the Council has to spend on services it delivers.
Care & Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)	CSSIW encourages the improvement of social care, early years and social services in Wales. It also inspects public and private care providers and local authorities.
City Region	A City Region is a network of urban communities (across the Swansea Bay City Region) sharing resources such as central business area, labour market and transport market to provide larger a more efficient labour markets and therefore better job prospects for creation. Scope for better planning of housing, transport, support for businesses and other services beyond existing administration boundaries and better prospects for attracting investment, innovation and value added economic activity.
Community Cohesion	Community cohesion is a term to describe how everyone in a geographical area lives alongside each other with mutual understanding and respect.
Corporate Parenting Policy	Corporate Parenting is being a good parent to children and young people in care so they grow up happy and are able to make a success of their life. Everyone who works for the Council is a Corporate Parent. The policy brings together different departments of the Council and the Health Authority and other people and organisations who work with children and young people in care, so that the needs and wishes of those in care are listened to and acted on to help them reach their goals.
21st Century Schools Programme	The 21st Century Schools Programme is a One Wales commitment and a

	<p>unique collaboration between the Welsh Government (WG), the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and local authorities.</p> <p>It is a major, long-term and strategic capital investment programme with the aim of creating a generation of 21st century schools in Wales. The programme will focus resources on the right schools in the right places, for early years through to post-16.</p>
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	The Council has a legal duty to undertake Impact Assessments on all our current and future functions, policies and procedures in respect of race, disability and gender to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, in employment and service delivery, and foster strong community spirit, identity and confidence.
Estyn	Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales.
Forward Financial Plan	A key document the Council has which sets out how we will achieve a balanced budget, the amount of savings we need to make, and how those savings will be made.
Improvement Objectives	The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 requires us to publish a list of Improvement Objectives each year. We also have to follow Welsh Government statutory guidance to help us do this.
Learning Pathways Programme (14 to 19 year olds)	Learning Pathways Programme encourages more young people to achieve their potential. It will do this by contributing to an improvement in qualifications, supporting an improvement in the proportion of 16 year olds progressing to further learning in education and training, widening choice and promoting equality of opportunity.
Local Service Board (LSB)	A strategic partnership forum made up of senior leaders from across the public, private and voluntary sectors. Their aim is to identify and agree areas where we can work together to improve the wellbeing of local people.

Partnership	Other organisations the council works with to deliver services.
Procurement	‘Procurement is about the purchase of the goods, works and services.’
Protected characteristics	The Equality Act 2010 gives protection to various groups. These are: Age; Race; Disability; Religion and Belief; Gender Reassignment; Sex; Marriage and Civil Partnership; Sexual Orientation; and Pregnancy and Maternity.
Safeguarding Action Plan	The Council and other partners working together to produce an action plan to ensure that best practice is being implemented so that vulnerable adults and children at risk of abuse are kept safe.
Single Integrated Plan	A community partnership plan to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.
Strategic Equality Plan (SEP)	This Plan sets out our Equality Objectives as required under the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, and what we are doing to meet them. The plan includes information such as our engagement process, our process to assess the impact on protected groups of our policies, the collection of relevant equality information and information on pay differences, staff training, and annual reporting.
Sustainable Development	A document which publicises an organisation’s commitment to making decisions that take long term social, economic and environmental issues into account.
Systems Thinking	A methodology the Council uses to redesign Council services to make them more efficient.

<p>Vibrant & Viable Places</p>	<p>Vibrant and Viable Places is the Welsh Government's regeneration framework which was launched in March 2013. Local authorities will share more than £100m for regeneration schemes from 2014 to 2017. The fund focuses on regeneration activity in Welsh town centres with an emphasis on improvement to the housing supply. The objective is to create more versatile and diversified town centres that are not solely focused on retail provision. There is also an emphasis on linking with local Communities First programmes to provide additional training and employment opportunities in deprived areas.</p>
<p>Welfare Reforms</p>	<p>The UK Government's aim of welfare reform is to make the benefit system fairer and more affordable to help reduce poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency and to reduce levels of fraud and error. By reforming the welfare system the UK Government wants to help more people to move into and progress in work, while supporting the most vulnerable.</p>