

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REPORT

Date Written	3 rd January 2020
Report Author	Judith Jones
Service Area	Neighbourhood Services, Planning and Countryside
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To: Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen

Corporate Self-Evaluation – Question 2 (Provision & Service Delivery)

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Self-evaluation is a rigorous process enables Chief Officers, Heads of Service and officers to be critically reflective about outcomes, service provision and leadership and management.
- 1.2 Following a refocus exercise of documentation to ensure it continued to meet the organisation's needs; the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT) approved the re-introduction of the corporate self-evaluation process in May 2019.
- 1.3 The process is completed in 'bite-sized' chunks on a question-by-question basis. This aims to support all officers involved to contribute to the process whilst maintaining their ability to manage multiple other priorities.
- 1.4 This report focuses on the completion of the self-evaluation undertaken by the Chief Officer: Neighbourhood Services and her teams in relation to Key Question 2 (Provision & Service Delivery). The response directly relates to the Environmental Wellbeing theme laid down in the Council's Corporate Plan: Focus on the Future.
- 1.5 This report and its appendices highlight the key findings of the self-evaluation activity; outline areas of good practice along with areas for development; and identifies the priorities for improvement that will be developed into a Business Improvement Plan.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 Scrutiny Committee Members are requested to review the documentation and key findings following completion of Key Question 2 of the process.
- 2.2 Committee Members to review and scrutinise the evaluative judgements provided by officers within the report identified through completion of the self-evaluation process.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Self-evaluation is a business process that is rigorous and enables organisations to be critically reflective about outcomes, service provision and leadership and management. In 2013/14, the Council introduced a self-evaluation process which was completed by officers at Head of Service level. The format of the challenge sessions was based on high-level challenge in a session lasting 2-2½ hours; with a number of Heads of Service.
- 3.2 From using lessons learned over previous years, the format of the challenge of self-evaluation was developed (e.g.) self-evaluation was undertaken on a service-level basis; with challenge being offered a Performance Board consisting the Chief Executive, Directorate Lead; Portfolio Member and the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee to which the service reported. The key outcome of the process was to identify areas of good practice; along with priorities for improvement.
- 3.3 In 2019, a refocus exercise was undertaken to ensure the self-evaluation documents continued to meet the organisation's needs (e.g.) offered officers completing the forms opportunity to outline the current service position; highlight any good practice; note areas for development and to identify the services' priorities for improvement. The documents were organised in the form of 3 key questions:
 - Outcomes;
 - Provision and Service Delivery; and
 - Leadership and management.

There was no specific order in which the questions needed to be completed, as long as all three questions were completed within the year.

- 3.4 Following consideration of the updated documents by the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT); the new format was approved for re-introduction in May 2019.
- 3.5 As part of the process cycle supporting the delivery of the self-evaluation process (see **Appendix 1**), it was proposed that completed questions should be presented before the sector-specific scrutiny committee, which normally scrutinises the outputs/outcomes for the relevant service area. This was seen as an opportunity for Committee Members to review and explore facets of the wide range of activities for which Chief Officers were accountable; whilst for services, it was seen as an opportunity for details of their services to be brought before scrutiny to outline positive practice and achievements along with any challenges faced and areas for development.

- 3.6 Committee Members are asked to review the content of the completed questions and consider performance, areas of good practice, areas for development and, perhaps most importantly, the services' priorities for improvement for the coming year. Scrutineers are also required to assess whether the judgement reached through completion of the process is appropriate.

4.0 WHERE WE WERE

- 4.1 In previous years, the Council had undertaken self-evaluation activities annual basis on a service-by service basis. The process required Heads of Service to review project/programme activity and reflect on what had been achieved, as well as identifying what needed to be prioritised next with a view to planning how should be done.

5.0 WHERE WE ARE NOW

- 5.1 Following approval of the refocused self-evaluation (both process and paperwork); discussions took place with each of the 4 Chief Officers who confirmed that a copy of the paperwork should be issued to their teams so they might consider how they wished to contribute to preparing a response.
- 5.2 This specific report links to the response for the service areas for which the **Chief Officer – Neighbourhood Services** is accountable. It also relates to the **Environmental Wellbeing** theme contained within MTCBC's Corporate Wellbeing Plan (Focus on the Future: wellbeing in our community).
- 5.3 The Chief Officer requested that, with support from the Performance & Scrutiny Team, a workshop be arranged to enable all relevant officers to have input to the production of the response document.
- 5.4 In order to maximise the time allocated for the workshop, service managers were asked to work with their teams to prepare a service-specific response. This would then be submitted to the Performance & Scrutiny Officer who would produce one collated document for the Chief Officer and all attendees. The Performance Officer would also undertake some basic analysis of the key findings to support discussions and internal challenge at the workshop event.
- 5.5 The workshop session took place on Tuesday 17th December 2019. Led by the Chief Officer and supported by the Performance & Scrutiny Officer; the session was well attended by officers from across the Neighbourhood Services and Planning and Countryside teams. Here the document and its findings were, reviewed, discussed and challenged. Some suggested amendments identified through completion of this process and these have been actioned and incorporated into the version of the collated document (Appendix 2).
- 5.6 The overall provision and service delivery for Neighbourhood Services was found to be **Adequate**.

Individual Area Self-Evaluation Judgements

Question	Highways	Development Control	Street Cleansing	Waste Services	Engineering	Building Control	Fly-tipping	Parks & Bereavement
Q2.1	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate
Q2.2	Adequate	Good	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Good	Adequate	Adequate
Q2.3	Adequate	Good	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate
Overall	Adequate	Good	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate	Adequate

- 5.7 On the whole it is felt that engagement with support services is adequate, this judgement has been arrived at on the basis that there is room for improvement that would enable services to operate more efficiently but is an acceptable level of service, with the following issues being most consistently noted:-
- 5.8 All of the services within Neighbourhood services have touch points with the Customer Contact Centre, some more frequently than others i.e. the front line services; however what is clear is that every service suffers from calls being put through to the wrong department resulting in having to deal with aggrieved customers which is an inefficient use of time and reflects badly on the Authority. Most managers felt that contact centre staff should be better trained in where to direct calls, some felt that their service would operate better if customers could contact services directly (Planning and Building regs operate mostly this way as they need to build a rapport with repeat customers and agents).
- 5.9 The service provided by ICT often leads to inefficient working practices for the following reasons – the spec of hardware provided to professional services (Planning, Engineering, Building regs) is not tailored to their needs to accept large documents and plans frequently over 10mb and as such leads to poor customer service and loss of customers and income because they cannot accept plans electronically. The same spec of pc's are provided to everyone from HR (dealing with A4 letters) to Engineers (dealing with complex huge documents). Secondly, if a pc needs replacing you have to wait 8 weeks for a new one as no stock is kept, and thirdly the reliance on a single part-time officer with knowledge of UNIFORM (the Planning and B.reg's database) is a serious concern, when an issue arises and this officer is not in work there is no back up within ICT and seemingly no succession planning.
- 5.10 The support offered by Legal varied between departments, front line services are happy with the support provided whilst the professional services of Planning and B.reg's voiced concern over the level of knowledge and expertise with many minor matters being referred to a barrister at great cost resulting in the department effectively paying twice for legal support.
- 5.11 All Manager's highlighted the support they receive from accountancy as good practice, citing regular monthly meetings and provision of data as well as their input in costing projects and preparing efficiency savings.

- 5.12 Waste services highlighted the value they get from monthly meetings with corporate communications and having an officer dedicated to communicating their campaigns. Parks and Bereavements highlighted the good working relationship they have with health & safety, working with them continuously not just when an accident occurs. Planning highlighted the good working relationship they have with Democratic Services.
- 5.13 Most Services within Neighbourhood Services (NS) take advantage of opportunities for collaboration and partnership working. Details of these are included at Appendix 2 and areas where these practices could be developed are also identified. Many Manager's highlighted regional and national working groups which bring Local authorities together to share best practice, e.g. Engineers: County Surveyors Society, Building Control: Local Authority Building Control (LABC).
- 5.14 Positive examples of collaboration and partnership working include Carmarthenshire Council providing a minerals Planning service; Highways sharing a depot and equipment with Rhondda Cynon Taff (RCT), and collaborating with Caerphilly Council to operate the gulley cleaning service and Street cleansing working in partnership with South Wales Trunk Road Agent (SWTRA) to carry out road cleansing. Waste services are currently working collaboratively with Blaenau Gwent Council on the Keeping up with the Jones's recycling campaign and over the last year have worked in partnership with the Registered Social Landlords (RSL) to carry out community recycling events.
- 5.15 The Engineering service is part of a joint venture with Capita which allows them to access engineering and other expertise. The road safety part of the service works in partnership with schools.
- 5.16 Building Control are part of the LABC Partnership scheme where an application can be made to any LA in the Country and accepted by the inspecting authority.
- 5.17 The Services understanding and use of the five ways of working is considered to be adequate, with evidence of better understanding and use in areas such as Planning, where sustainable development has been embedded since the 1990's. By its very nature Planning works 'long term' with the production of the Council's 15 year land use plan – the Local Development Plan (LDP). The LDP's aims (amongst other things) are to 'prevent' population decline and inappropriate development. The preparation of the LDP includes evidence gathering and wide stakeholder 'involvement' over a period of four years; in order to be found sound by a Welsh Government Inspector the plan has to demonstrate that it 'integrates' with other plans and strategies.
- 5.18 Services such as Parks, Fly tipping and Street cleansing acknowledge that they need to develop their understanding and use of the five ways of working, whilst Waste services and Engineering can evidence embedded practice in certain areas of using the sustainable development principle. As such there are opportunities to learn from each other across services and adopt practices. The Self Evaluation internal challenge sessions have been helpful in exploring these opportunities.
- 5.19 Appendix 2 of this report provides more detail on the initiatives set out above as well as how the work contributes to the Wellbeing objectives.

6.0 WHERE WE WANT TO BE

- 6.1 We want the Customer Contact Centre to improve the filtering of customer complaints, phone calls and public requests. The public get annoyed being passed-on to different departments, which does not help the Council's reputation and generates more complaints. If the Customer Contact Team were trained in developing a better understanding of departments, they would not only help services by saving them time, enabling them to be more productive and the Council would appear more efficient.
- 6.2 Dedicated administrative support for Highways e.g. someone who could answer routine queries, deal with general requests and applications and update completed work orders. This would allow technical staff to focus on actual Highway activities, rather than carrying out admin tasks.
- 6.3 We want to explore the possibility of the same Solicitor scrutinising all Planning enforcement notices and then undertaking any subsequent court cases rather than the current practice of different solicitors doing each role.
- 6.4 We want scanning to be carried out by planning technical support officers.
- 6.5 We want fit for purpose ICT equipment and processes / hardware and software (e.g. drop box provision) across all NS. The 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate and results in inefficient working practices.
- 6.6 We want fit for purpose ICT equipment and processes / hardware and software (e.g. drop box provision) across all NS. The 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate and results in inefficient working practices.
- 6.7 We want to review the Street Cleansing sweeper rounds and prioritise routes in a mapping system.
- 6.8 We want to improve the Waste data recording/reporting to NRW for WDF and permitted site returns.
- 6.9 We want to develop the role of support services to successfully implement more Behavioural Change Waste projects to increase recycling and reduce residual waste.
- 6.10 We want to engage further with Corporate Communications to advertise our land drainage service and the sustainable drainage design service.
- 6.11 We want Legal training for both Building Control officers and Solicitors to better understand BC legislation.
- 6.12 We want to work with Corporate Coms more to promote fly tipping work to ensure the public and Councillors are aware of enforcement action being taken to tackle fly tipping and to help inform the public of new initiatives such as the 'Grassland Management initiative'
- 6.13 We want Fly tipping to continue to work with ICT to improve the 'report it' form to ensure it is working to its full capacity.

- 6.14 We want to better incorporate the five ways of working into the work we do across NS.
- 6.15 We want to evaluate the Park's department's web site and look at ways to resource the work required to update it.
- 6.16 We want to define Parks outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits.
- 6.17 We want to develop the Parks department's leadership & management capability.
- 6.18 We want to work with Caerphilly Council to improve the planning of gully cleansing operations for it to become more efficient. Current practice does not inform the public of when cleansing will take place, which results in many of the gully's not being cleaned. If residents were to be given prior notice to move vehicles then gully cleansing operations would be more productive.
- 6.19 We want to develop greater collaboration between Planning and the Councils Housing department, developers and Housing Associations to ensure the delivery of affordable housing in the correct locations.
- 6.20 We want to create street/ward champions in conjunction with Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) and create closer working links with Barod.
- 6.21 We want to improve Waste services communication with our residents in order to address collection issues and maximise recycling.
- 6.22 We want regular meetings with the South Wales Police in relation to parking issues and enforcement throughout Merthyr.
- 6.23 We want to develop greater sharing of information between departments on access to Geographic Information System (GIS) maps and information already held to avoid duplication of work.
- 6.24 We want to develop better working relationships with other Local Authorities to widen the joint fly tipping exercises carried out with Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) and the Police.
- 6.25 Create a stronger relationship with external organisation such as South Wales Police (SWP) and Fire Service to carry out multi-organisational fly tipping operations to tackle specific problematic areas such as the Common and work more closely with Fly-tipping Action Wales (FtAW) and Natural Resource Wales (NRW) to close gaps in Enforcement where responsibilities overlap.
- 6.26 We want Parks to have better links with the Countryside team to ensure the Council's duties are being met and contributed to by both sections working together not in isolation and sometimes at odds with each other.

7.0 WHAT WE NEED TO DO NEXT

- 7.1 To provide more training for Customer Contact Centre staff, in order for them to direct complaints and request to relevant departments.
- 7.2 HR to work with Neighbourhood Services in developing succession plans.
- 7.3 Work with ICT to ensure the provision of fit for purpose ICT equipment and processes (e.g. drop box provision) across all Neighbourhood services.
- 7.4 Work with Legal to agree that the same solicitor deals with enforcement cases from drafting to prosecution.
- 7.5 Planning to agree a process with Housing to ensure delivery of the right type of affordable housing in the most needed locations.
- 7.6 Review the potential to integrate Fly Tipping and Street Cleansing into Grounds Maintenance & Parks – Business Plan.
- 7.7 Reconfigure weekly sweeper rounds, prioritising areas (all staff to work to a 7 day rota).
- 7.8 Continue the good practice working with Support Services through the Behavioural change project with the implementation of the Keeping up with the Joneses campaign and a structured Communications campaign.
- 7.9 Explore more effective and innovative ways of working, utilising the skills and knowledge of Corporate Communications and Service Support.
- 7.10 Waste - Make improvements to our data recording system to ensure that the potential to make mistakes are limited/alleviated. This included alerts built in and limited access to the data.
- 7.11 Waste- Make improvements to the way in which we communicate requirements to residents and improve the availability / delivery of food waste bags.
- 7.12 Engage with Corporate Communications to advertise our land drainage service and sustainable drainage design service.
- 7.13 Building Control (BC) to identify legislation training for legal and BC officer's.
- 7.14 Continue to work with ICT to improve the fly-tipping online reporting form using feedback from public and Councillors.
- 7.15 Develop knowledge and understanding of the Future Generations Act and the 5 ways of working within the Act in order to shape how we engage with corporate support staff.
- 7.16 Meet with Caerphilly Highways to negotiate improved planning of gully cleansing operations.

- 7.17 Street cleansing to create better links with SWTRA to utilise as many planned road closures as possible;
- 7.18 Street Cleansing to create better links with the Police and Barod to share drug litter intelligence.
- 7.19 Liaise more with RSLs to ensure areas are getting litter picked together to improve overall cleanliness;
- 7.20 Regular meetings with the South Wales Police to form a joined up approach to solve parking issues and carry out more fly tipping enforcement activities
- 7.21 Liaise more with joint border local authorities to share fly-tipping intelligence and to agree a more consistent approach to enforcement to try and collectively reduce fly tipping.
- 7.22 Fly tipping to create better working relationships with internal departments, such as Trading Standards, to assist one another in enforcement where strengths can be called upon from each team.
- 7.23 Better links between the Parks and Countryside team to ensure the Council's aims are being met and contributed to by both sections working together not in isolation and sometimes at odds with each other.
- 7.24 Develop the Parks department's website to enable Councillors and public to access information.

These proposals will be developed into a Business Improvement Plan.

8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO WELLBEING OBJECTIVES

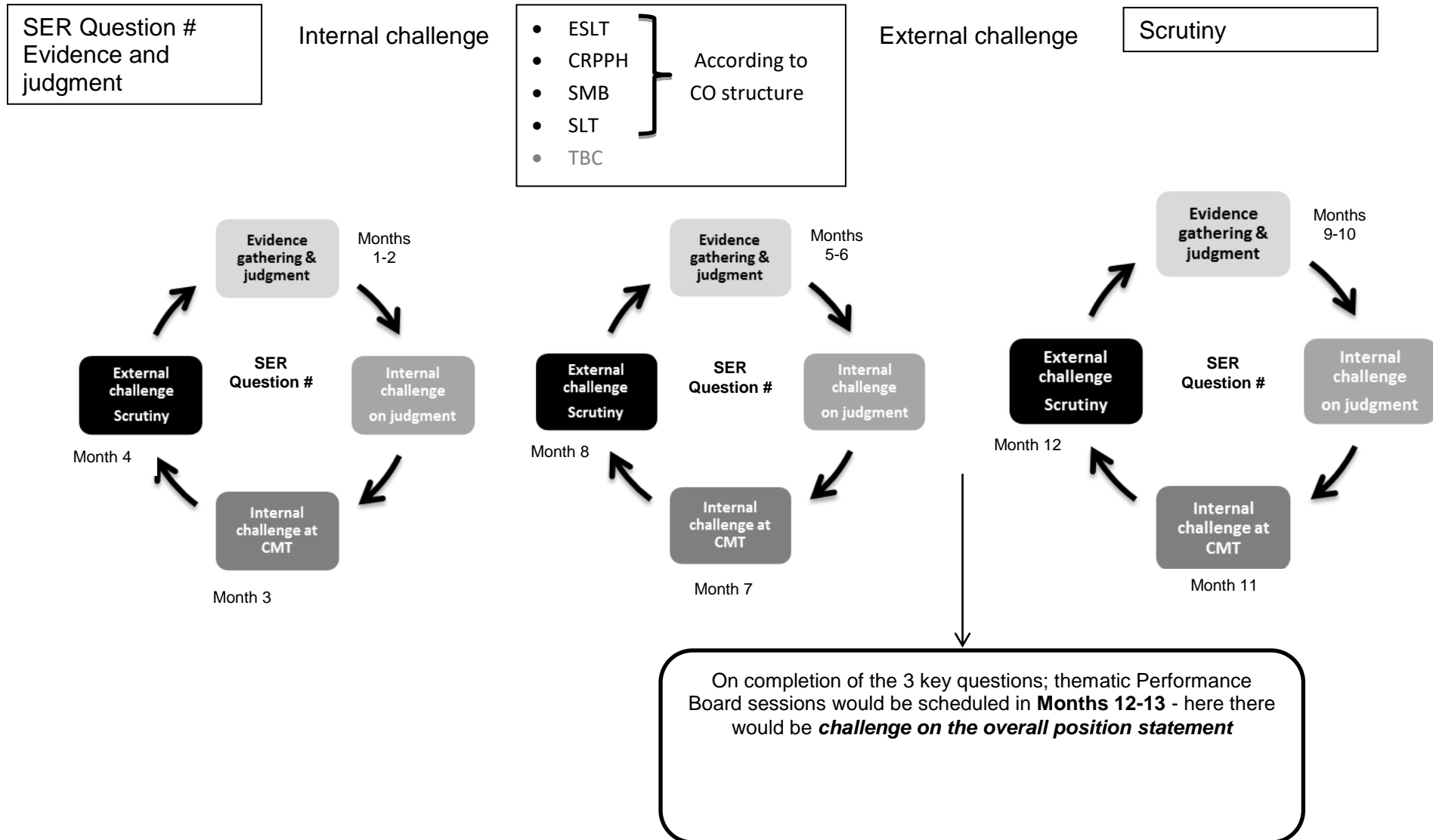
- 8.1 The corporate self-evaluation process is based around the services/activities delivered and should reflect the contribution made in relation to the four wellbeing objectives set down by the Council in focus in the Corporate Wellbeing Plan.
- 8.2 This report specifically links to the Environmental Wellbeing objective within the Council's Corporate Wellbeing Plan: **Communities protect, enhance and promote our environment and countryside.**
- 8.3 Through completion of other self-evaluation responses; we will also be able to demonstrate our team's contribution to support progress against the following objectives:
 - People are empowered to live independently within their communities, where they are safe and enjoy good physical and mental health; and
 - People feel supported to develop the skills required to meet the needs of businesses, with a developing, safe infrastructure that establishes Merthyr Tydfil as an attractive destination.

**JUDITH JONES
CHIEF OFFICER PLANNING &
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

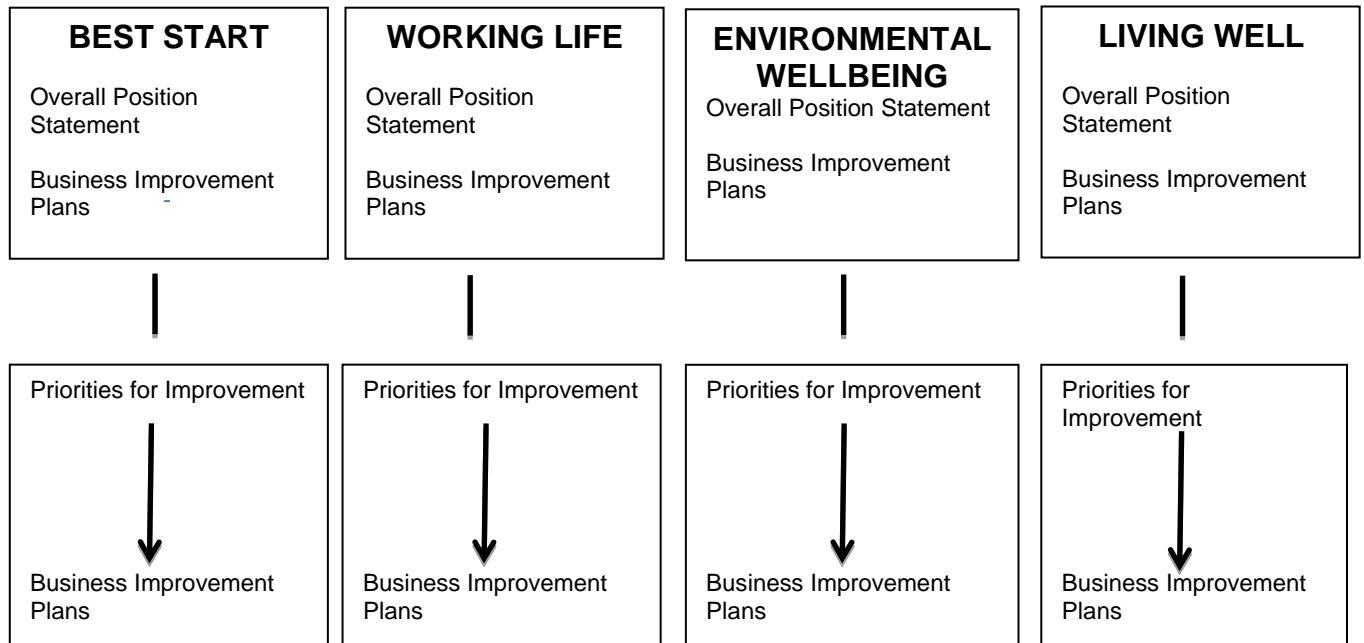
**COUNCILLOR DAVID HUGHES
CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING &
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES**

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		

Self-Evaluation Process Cycle: 4 months x 3



Performance Board



Analysis of commonalities → Report to CMT to identify support needed to drive improvement

