Asset Management: Has the Council acted on our recommendations?

Neath Port Talbot Council

July 2026

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

1 This report sets out the findings of a follow up review which looked at what action Neath Port Talbot Council (the Council) has taken in response to recommendations we made in 2023.

2 In 2023, we looked at the Council's arrangements for managing its assets. The assets we focused on were its office accommodation and buildings from which the Council delivered services to residents. Our overall finding from the review in 2023 was that the Council does not have a current vision and plan for managing its assets or timely and comprehensive monitoring arrangements. We issued three recommendations covering strategy, planning and delivery, and governance and monitoring.

3 The Council set out to the Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) what it was going to do in response to the recommendations. It stated that it was going to address all the recommendations by February 2025. In this follow up review, we have considered the actions taken by the Council and how any new arrangements are being embedded.

Why this is important

4 The Council's buildings are an important part of how it delivers its services. Buildings cost money to run and maintain. It is important that the Council understands what it wants from its assets in the long term, how it is using them and ensures that it is getting value for money from its approach.

5 This follow up review is important to establish whether the Council has taken effective action to address the weaknesses identified in our 2023 report.

What we have found

6 The Council has not taken effective action to address the recommendations in our 2023 report. We found that the Council:

- has updated its Corporate Asset Management Plan but has not set a long-term plan for its assets or the outcomes it wants to achieve;
- does not have effective corporate oversight of asset management or a consistent approach to delivery; and
- does not know if it is delivering value for money on the management of its assets.

7 The Council considered that the 2023 recommendations were completed and closed. However, none of them have been fully addressed. Therefore, we also highlight opportunities to strengthen the Council's corporate oversight of progress on implementing external audit recommendations.

What we recommend

8 We have made five recommendations. Four recommendations focus on improving the Council's asset management arrangements by:

- demonstrating fuller consideration of the sustainable development principle;
- strengthening governance and oversight;
- clarifying which overview and scrutiny committee has asset management in its role and scope; and
- assessing value for money.

9 We made a fifth recommendation for the Council to review its arrangements for agreeing when recommendations from external audit have been actioned and can be closed.

Our findings

Asset management

The Council has updated its Corporate Asset Management Plan but has not set a long-term plan for its assets or the outcomes it wants to achieve

10 In our 2023 report, we made three recommendations. Recommendation one was: ‘In developing its new Corporate Asset Management Strategy, the Council should put the Sustainable Development Principle at the heart of its considerations.[1] In particular setting out its long-term vision and the outcomes it wants to achieve over the short, medium and longer term.’ Our finding is that the Council has only partially met this recommendation.

11 In 2024, the Council updated its corporate policy document for asset management. The policy document has three sections:

- Asset Management Plan 2024-29;
- Asset Management Strategy 2024-27; and
- Asset Management Action Plan – a three-year rolling programme (currently up to 2028).

For the purposes of this report we will refer to this document as the Council’s Corporate Asset Management Plan (CAMP).

[1] The Sustainable Development Principle means acting in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

12 The CAMP has taken account of some elements of the Sustainable Development Principle, but key gaps remain. For example, the CAMP does not set out a long-term plan for the Council's assets. The period covered is only five years, from 2024-2029. Demonstration of integration and alignment with other strategies is not clear, and the Council's involvement of key stakeholders in the development of the CAMP was limited.

13 The CAMP sets out what actions the Council intends to take. The action plan has a column that states the objective for each action, but it lacks clarity on how outcomes and impact will be assessed.

14 The impact of the Council not having a sufficiently long-term plan for its assets and not having clearly set out the outcomes that it wants to achieve is that it cannot take well informed strategic decisions around its assets.

The Council does not have effective corporate oversight of asset management or a consistent approach to delivery

15 Recommendation two was: 'Once the Council has agreed its new Corporate Asset Management Strategy, it should develop the supporting arrangements to ensure that it has sufficient corporate oversight and a consistent approach to the delivery of its asset objectives across the organisation.' Our finding is that the Council has not met this recommendation.

16 The Council has set out its governance arrangements in its CAMP. This includes setting up a Corporate Asset Management Group (CAMG). This is an officer group made up of representatives from across services. Under the CAMG the governance structure shows three subgroups.

17 These governance arrangements are not fully operational. Despite the CAMP being adopted in April 2024, the CAMG did not meet until November 2025. It has only met twice. Because of this, it is not yet fully discharging the functions set out in the CAMP. None of the three subgroups have yet been set up.

18 The CAMP also sets out the following reporting arrangements:

- yearly performance reporting against agreed metrics;
- six-monthly action plan updates;
- quarterly exception reports;
- annual property performance report; and
- mid-term review of the AMP.

19 None of these reports have been completed or reported to either officers or councillors in line with the stated governance arrangements. The last annual property performance report was in 2019. The impact of this is that the Council does not have effective governance or reporting arrangements to ensure oversight of asset management.

20 There is a lack of clarity in the Council about which overview and scrutiny committee has asset management in its remit and scope. The Council's constitution lists 'Facilities and Asset Management' in the scope of the Performance, Governance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However, 'Estate Management (non-housing/non-operational property)' and 'Estates and Valuation (including acquisition and disposal of land/property)' is in the scope of the Culture, Connection and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The confusion over which scrutiny committee has asset management in its role and scope could hinder oversight.

21 The Council has not developed a consistent approach to the management of its assets. The CAMP states that adopting a corporate landlord model (CLM) will be its mechanism to deliver this.[2] The Council does not have a collective understanding of what their current model is or what they want for the future. Under the CAMP, the CLM was due to be adopted by September 2025. SLT has only recently (March 2026) been presented with some options. Discussions are at an early stage and there is currently no agreed way forward. As a result, there is a lack of clarity around the roles and responsibilities for building management and maintenance across the Council.

The Council does not know if it is delivering value for money on the management of its assets

22 Recommendation three was: 'To ensure that the Council is able to understand the progress its asset management strategy and arrangements are making and how those are helping to deliver and achieve its Well-being Objectives, it will need to assure itself that its current governance arrangements are sufficient to effectively monitor its progress. To ensure that it can better understand the progress it is making around its assets, and to determine if it is delivering value for money, the Council needs to:

- develop and communicate regular progress monitoring reports;
- develop a broader set of asset related measures; and
- look for opportunities to benchmark itself against other organisations.'

Our finding is that the Council has not met this recommendation.

23 The Council is not monitoring delivery against its CAMP. Key components of the CAMP have not been completed by the timescales set. These include:

- corporate accommodation strategy (was due April 2024);

[2] A corporate landlord model is an approach to asset management that centralises responsibility for property across the organisation to provide clear corporate oversight and a consistent approach to managing, maintaining and using assets.

- adoption of a disposals and acquisition strategy (was due September 2024);
- review of the Community Asset Transfer Strategy (was due November 2024); and
- updated repairs and maintenance strategy (was due September 2025).

All of these actions remain outstanding. Slippage against the action plan has not been reported to strategic leaders, weakening oversight and accountability.

24 The Council does not have an agreed set of measures on which to assess its asset management arrangements. In its CAMP the Council set September 2024 as the date by which these would be in place. The CAMP lists examples of measures the Council might use but these are not developed. The Council is also not benchmarking itself on asset management against other organisations.

25 The Council collects some data on its assets. This is held in a database which the Council reports is difficult to extract information from. This limits its usefulness. Also, some of the data is not up to date. For example, the information on the condition of its assets. The Council has started to update this information, but it estimates that it will take at least two years to complete the initial assessment.

26 The impact of this is that the Council does not know what progress it is making on its CAMP. It does not know if its asset strategy is helping to deliver its well-being objectives. This increases the risk that its approach to asset management is reactive and opportunistic rather than strategic. As a result, it cannot assure itself that it is delivering value for money on asset management.

Monitoring the delivery of audit recommendations

The Council does not have a robust process for agreeing when recommendations issued by external audit have been actioned and can be closed

27 The Council did not have adequate arrangements in place to assure itself that actions taken in response to the 2023 recommendations were completed before they were closed.

28 Recommendations made by external audit and the Council's intended response are reported to GAC. They are included on the Council's recommendations tracker. This tracker is updated and reported to GAC on a six-monthly basis. The recommendations from our 2023 report were considered complete by the relevant service managers and closed on the tracker, without any further updates to GAC. There was no oversight or challenge of that decision by SLT or GAC.

29 It is important that the Council has a robust and transparent arrangement in place for closing recommendations, to assure itself that effective action has been taken to address them.

Recommendations

R1	The Council should ensure in its mid-term review of its CAMP that it can demonstrate how it is applying the sustainable development principle to its corporate asset management arrangements (**paragraphs 12-14**).
R2	The Council should ensure that the reporting, governance and oversight arrangements it has agreed in its CAMP are operating as intended, to ensure there is effective oversight of progress and outcomes (**paragraphs 16-21**).
R3	The Council should ensure that it clarifies which overview and scrutiny committee has asset management in its role and scope to ensure responsibility for scrutiny oversight is clear (**paragraph 20**).
R4	The Council should develop an approach for assessing the value for money of its corporate asset management arrangements (**paragraphs 24-26**).

R5 To ensure effective oversight of the Council's response to external audit recommendations, the Council should review its arrangements for agreeing when recommendations have been actioned and can be closed (**paragraphs 27-29**).

Appendices

1 About our work

Scope of the audit

The audit followed up on the Council's progress in implementing the recommendations in the Auditor General for Wales' report Springing Forward – Strategic Management of Assets, Neath Port Talbot Council, December 2023.

We undertook this work between April and May 2026.

Audit questions and criteria

Questions

We looked at whether the Council has taken effective action to address the recommendations in our 2023 report.

Criteria

In answering this question, we considered audit criteria. These criteria were informed through our cumulative audit knowledge. They cover timeliness and oversight of the actions taken, and the arrangements the Council has in place to assess and demonstrate its own progress. We also considered how the Council has applied the sustainable development principle.

Methods

We used the following methods to gather evidence:

- **Self-assessment** – We asked the Council to complete an assessment of its progress against the recommendations in our 2023 report.
- **Document review** – We examined documents provided to us by the Council.

- **Interviews** – We held interviews with staff and councillors involved in the oversight and management of asset management.

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