

Setting of well-being objectives – Powys County Council

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Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a 'well-being duty' on 48 public bodies. The duty requires those bodies to set and publish 'well-being objectives' that are designed to maximise their contribution to achieving each of the Act's seven national well-being goals.¹ They must also take all reasonable steps, in exercising their functions, to meet those objectives.
- 2 The Auditor General must carry out examinations to assess the extent to which public bodies have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives.² We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025.³
- 3 To do something in accordance with 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'. To achieve this, a public body must take account of the five ways of working: long term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention.⁴
- 4 We designed an assessment framework to enable us to assess the extent to which public bodies have applied the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives. **Appendix 1** sets out further information on our approach, including a set of 'positive indicators' that illustrate what good could look like.
- 5 In designing our approach, we considered what we could reasonably expect from public bodies at this point in time. Public bodies should now be familiar with the sustainable development principle and ways of working and be seeking to apply them in a meaningful way. At the same time, we appreciate that public bodies are still developing their experience in applying the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives. Therefore, the examinations include consideration of how public bodies are applying their learning and how they can improve in future.

¹ The seven national well-being goals are; a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales.

² Section 15 (1) (a) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

³ The Auditor General must carry out examinations over the period set out in the Act, which begins one year before a Senedd election and ends one year and one day before the following Senedd election.

⁴ Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Carrying out our examination at Powys County Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - explain how Powys County Council (the Council) applied the sustainable development principle throughout in the process of setting its well-being objectives;
 - provide assurance on the extent that the Council applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
 - identify opportunities for the Council to further embed the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives in future.
- 7 We set out to answer the question ‘to what extent has the Council acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives’. We did this by exploring the following questions:
 - Was the process the Council put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
 - Has the Council considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
 - Has the Council put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?
- 8 We discussed the timing of the examination with the Council, and we tailored the delivery to reflect its specific circumstances.
- 9 We gathered our evidence in the following ways:
 - reviewing key documents;
 - running a workshop with key officers and Members who were involved with setting the well-being objectives; and
 - carrying out a final clarification meeting on outstanding issues with key individuals in addition to the above.
- 10 We also provided some informal feedback to officers on the key findings from our work prior to sharing this report.

How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 11 The Council's new ‘Stronger, Fairer, Greener Corporate and Strategic Equality Plan 2023-2027’ (the Corporate Plan), was adopted by the Council in February 2023. The Corporate Plan is structured around its three new Well-being Objectives, these being:

- we will improve people’s awareness of services, and how to access them, so that they can make informed choices;
 - we will support good quality, sustainable, employment and training opportunities, whilst pursuing real living wage employer accreditation;
 - we will work to tackle poverty and inequality to support the well-being of the people of Powys.
- 12 Whilst there is not a specific Well-being statement in the new Corporate Plan, it does include the respective elements of the Well-being statement as required by the Well-being of Future Generations Act. An interactive version of the Corporate Plan was published on the Council’s website on 1st April 2023. The Council’s web pages hosting the interactive version of the Corporate Plan also include a link to an accessible version of the Corporate Plan.
- 13 In setting its new Well-being Objectives (WBOs) the Council has applied lessons learned from the previous setting of WBOs. These key lessons included:
- ensuring that the new Corporate Plan was less complex and introduced fewer broad, cross-cutting objectives with an aim to encourage a whole Council approach to ownership and delivery;
 - greater emphasis on ensuring that there was alignment between the Corporate Plan and the administrations political ambitions;
 - improving the corporate ownership of the Corporate Plan through better communication and engagement between officer and councillors; and
 - simplifying its strategic planning landscape by discharging its reporting duties under the Equalities Act and Well-being of Future Generations Act into one combined Plan.

What we found

The Council has applied the Sustainable Development Principle in setting its Well-being Objectives. However, it should draw on more diverse citizen views and fully embed its new monitoring arrangements.

The process for setting well-being objectives

Evidence Base

- 14 The Council has drawn on an extensive set of evidence and data to support the development of its new WBOs. Such as:
- the Annual Performance report 2021-22, which included a clear process for assessing performance against its prior WBOs;

- Service Self-Assessment workbooks and final report 2021-22;
 - the Well-being Information bank – which includes metrics on areas of Well-being such as Demographics, environment, health and the economy;
 - seven key priorities within the Progressive Partnership Agreement;
 - the Public Service Board (PSB) Well-being Assessment and resultant PSB Well-being Plan;
 - the Regional Partnership Boards, Population Needs Assessment.
- 15 The Council used a summary of the evidence to describe why each of the WBOs had been selected and this has been included within the ‘What we already know’ section ‘of the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan also captures data on long term trends and issues and needs.
- 16 Members and Officers were engaged in a clear process to develop the new WBO’s. This included running a series of workshops around key themes, such as; Poverty, Housing, Climate Change and Young People. There was an analysis on current situation, challenges and also historical and future trends for each theme.

Consultation and Involvement

- 17 As part of the Council’s internal engagement on its new Corporate Plan, Members and Officers were actively engaged in workshops to prioritise the steps the Council might take to deliver its WBOs using the Future Generations Commissioner’s Office (FGCO) self-reflection maturity framework. During these workshops they identified options for what steps would need to be taken if they were to achieve the different levels of maturity as outline in the FGCO framework.
- 18 The Council has engaged with citizens in the WBOs setting process both specifically through a survey and an online suggestions board and by using other existing consultations such as those undertaken for the PSB Well-being Assessment and Well-Being Plan. Whilst the Council has used this information to help shape the Corporate Plan it recognises that more could be done to ensure that it is able to draw on the views of the full diversity of the population, such as young people, in how it defined its WBOs.
- 19 The Council recently launched a Participation Strategy and its investment in a dedicated Participation Officer could help it set the framework and provide additional capacity for improving how it engages and involves the full diversity of citizens in Council initiatives. One area that the Council has suggested it will be looking to develop to support its participation and involvement ambitions is better engagement between the Council and local communities is through Town and Community Councils.
- 20 The Council’s ‘Aim’ within the Corporate Plan describes how individuals will be key to supporting the delivery of the WBO. For example, within the ‘Stronger’ element of the Aim the Council is committed to ‘...become a county that succeeds together, with communities and people’ and within the ‘Fairer’ element of the Aim the Council commits to being a ‘Council where people’s voices are heard and help to shape

our work and priorities'. Whilst there is this overall commitment, how individuals will do this, it is not specifically defined within the Corporate Plan. Therefore, as the Council rolls out its new Integrated Business Plans (IBPs) it will be important that these IBPs include more detail on how and when individuals will support this delivery.

Planning to improve well-being

- 21 The Council has mapped the connections between its own objectives and the national well-being goals within its new Corporate Plan. This contribution to the Goals is also considered in more detail within the Council's Integrated Impact Assessment for its new Corporate Plan.
- 22 The Council's WBOs and the steps to deliver these show a broad range of priorities that focus on both long- and short-term need. However, its plans to improve well-being through its WBOs also have an element of uncertainty as significant issues such as the cost-of-living and the refugee crisis may impact on fully delivering its WBO ambitions.
- 23 The WBO that is focused on tackling poverty clearly describes how delivering the WBO will also deliver multiple benefits and improve citizen well-being. Whilst the WBO around employment also includes some examples of delivering multiple benefits, identifying other examples of where it's WBO can deliver multiple benefits would help the Council to identify further opportunities to improve well-being across Powys.
- 24 Planning for Well-Being in Powys has been supported by there being good alignment between the PSB WBOs and the Council's WBOs. The Council has also established several positive collaborative initiatives with internal and external stakeholders in support of its WBOs. A good example of this is the Child Poverty Task Force which brings together a wide range of internal and external stakeholders to work in partnership to support the delivery of the Council's WBOs and is focused on reducing poverty.
- 25 Whilst the engagement with partners such as the Health Board continues to evolve and improve, more could be done to ensure that the priorities and WBOs of these partners are specifically considered in the setting of future Council WBOs.
- 26 There are some good examples of where the Council has set out steps to apply the preventative approach in helping to deliver its WBOs, such as:
 - its initiative to address the homeless crisis and offer more affordable homes;
 - using the Council's farm estate to help build food resilience and energy resilience whilst encouraging young families to enter the farming sector.

Delivering the well-being objectives

- 27 The key mechanism for delivering the Council's WBOs and steps will be through its new Integrated Business Planning Process (IBP) and Transformation Portfolio. The

Council now requires the new WBOs to be central to its evolving IBP process. Having this more explicit link should provide a clearer framework for the identification of actions and resources to deliver its WBO's. However, it will be important for the Council to evaluate the new IBP process and to assess if it is having the expected impact in delivering on the new WBOs.

- 28 The Council's WBOs have been designed to reflect the short, medium and longer-term, and whilst the Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) identifies its new WBOs as a key driver for its resource allocation, a clearer description of how the Council's resources will be prioritised to deliver on its WBOs would strengthen its arrangements. It will also be important that its future resourcing/financial plans identify how current and future savings targets or known future financial risks might impact the delivery of its WBOs.

Monitoring the well-being objectives

- 29 The Corporate Plan clearly outlines the governance framework for how the Council will monitor progress of its new WBOs. Whilst the Council has a clear process for monitoring its former WBOs, at the time of our fieldwork it was in the process of refreshing its existing Performance Management and Quality Assurance Framework with a new Assurance Framework and Corporate Reporting Dashboard. The aim of its Framework and Dashboard will be to ensure there is a consistent approach to monitoring and measuring progress on its WBOs. It will be important that this new framework is embedded quickly if the Council is to effectively assess the progress it is making against its WBOs.
- 30 For each WBO within the Corporate Plan there is set of measures/metrics that focus on gathering evidence on 'How much', 'How well', and 'What Difference' is being made by the Council in achieving its WBOs. The suite of measures under the 'What Difference' section include several broad measures focused on well-being such as: 'The percentage of people accessing leisure facilities who report positive well-being' and 'The percentage of people satisfied with the local area as a place to live'. These types of measures will be helpful in determining the progress being made on improving well-being for the citizens and place of Powys.

Recommendations

- R1 The Council should continue to build on the progress it has made in applying the sustainable development principle in the setting and delivery of its well-being objectives by:
- improving how it draws on the views of the full diversity of its citizens in designing of its future WBOs and in delivering its current WBOs;
 - ensuring the future iterations of its MTFP clearly show how the Council's resources will be prioritised to deliver its WBO's and also how current and future savings targets or known future financial risks might impact the delivery of its WBOs; and
 - ensuring that its new Performance Management and Quality Assurance Framework and Corporate Reporting Dashboard are embedded quickly to enable it to effectively monitor progress on its WBOs.

Appendix 1

Key questions and what we looked for

The table below sets out the question we sought to answer in carrying out this examination, along with some sub-questions to guide our evidence gathering. It also includes some 'positive indicators' that have been tailored to this examination, adapted from those we have previously used to inform our sustainable development principle examinations. This list is not a checklist, but rather an illustrative set of characteristics that describe what good could look like.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?	
Planning: Was the process the body put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?	
	Positive indicators

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

<p>Has the body used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the body's understanding of the 'as is'/ short-term need. • The body has set well-being objectives based on a good understanding of current and future need, risk and opportunities, including analysis of future trends. This is likely to be drawn from a range of local and national sources, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Public Services Boards' well-being assessments – Regional Partnership Boards' population assessments – The results of local involvement/ consultation exercises – Service monitoring and complaints – Future Trends report – Natural Resources Wales' State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales and Area Based Assessments • The body has sought to understand the root causes of problems so that it can address negative cycles and intergenerational challenges through its well-being objectives.
<p>Has the body involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body uses the results of involvement to help select its well-being objectives. That involvement – whether primary, secondary or a combination – reflects the full diversity of the population. • Involvement reflects good practice and advice from the Future Generations Commissioner.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

Has the body considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?

- The well-being objectives have been designed to improve well-being in the broadest sense and make a contribution across the seven national well-being goals.
- The well-being objectives have been designed to reflect and capitalise on the connections between different areas of work.
- There is a well-developed understanding of how the well-being objectives impact on/ relate to what other public bodies are trying to achieve and opportunities to work together.

Has the body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?

- The body has set objectives that are sufficiently ambitious and have been designed to drive activity across the organisation.
- The objectives are designed to meet short and longer-term need. Where objectives are set over a short to medium timeframe, they are set in the context of longer-term considerations or ambitions.

Resourcing and delivery: Has the body considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?

Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?

- Resources have been allocated to ensure the objectives can be delivered over the short and medium-term, but the body has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The body has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.
<p>Has the body considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The body is drawing on its knowledge of partners objectives/ activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.
<p>Monitor and review: Has the body put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?</p>	
<p>Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, e.g., by focusing on outcomes that cut across departmental/ organisational boundaries and deliver multiple (including preventative) benefits over the longer term.• There is a 'golden thread' that will allow the body to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.
<p>Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The body shows self-awareness and a commitment to improving how it applies the sustainable development principle so that it can do so in a meaningful and impactful way.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

development principle to setting its well-being objectives?

- The body has learnt from setting previous well-being objectives and from applying the sustainable development principle more generally and has improved the process for setting its new well-being objectives.
- The body has or plans to reflect on how it has applied the sustainable development principle in this round of setting well-being objectives.



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