

Setting of well-being objectives – Conwy County Borough Council

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Contents

Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives	4
Carrying out our examination at Conwy County Borough Council	5
How and when the Council set its well-being objectives	5
What we found: The Council has demonstrated a robust approach in its application of the sustainable development principle in the process of setting its new well-being objectives, but there was scope to more explicitly consider other organisations' objectives and the related impact on its own objectives	7
Recommendations	10
Appendix 1: Key questions and what we looked for	11

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 Conwy County Borough Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - explain how Conwy County Borough 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 overall 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; and
 - carrying out a small number of interviews with key senior staff.

How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 10 The Council commenced work on setting new well-being objectives during 2021 then published its new objectives in October 2022. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.
- 11 The Council published its well-being objectives as part of its Corporate Plan 2022-2027, which included its well-being statement that is required under the Act. The Corporate Plan 2022-2027 can be viewed on the Council's [website](#).

Exhibit 1: The Council's well-being objectives 2022-2027

People in Conwy value and look after the environment.

People in Conwy live in a county which has a prosperous economy with culture at its heart.

People in Conwy are educated and skilled.

People in Conwy have access to affordable, appropriate, good quality accommodation that enhances the quality of their lives.

People in Conwy are safe and feel safe.

People in Conwy are healthy.

People in Conwy live in a county where the use of Welsh is thriving and people can participate in all aspects of community life through the medium of Welsh.

People in Conwy are informed, included and listened to and can actively contribute to a community where their background and identity are valued and respected.

Conwy County Borough Council is resilient.

What we found

The Council has demonstrated a robust approach in its application of the sustainable development principle in the process of setting its new well-being objectives, but there was scope to more explicitly consider other organisations' objectives and the related impact on its own objectives

The process for setting the well-being objectives

Planning process

- 12 In order to understand how well the Council performed against its previous well-being objectives for the period 2017-2022, the Council used its six monthly performance reports and its service performance reviews.
- 13 The Council used those mechanisms to consider whether there were either areas for improvement or where further or different action was needed. In addition, the Council also used its corporate risk register and issues register to help it to understand what action it needed to take.

Evidence base

- 14 In order to understand current and future need, risks and opportunities, the Council drew on existing information gleaned from the Conwy and Denbighshire Public Services Board (PSB) well-being assessment. That well-being assessment drew on various sources of data such as the Future Trends Wales report and information from Stats Wales.
- 15 The Council also considered the Locality Health and Social Care needs assessment North Wales.
- 16 The Council's evidence base was also supplemented by its own engagement activity and its own information on performance against its previous well-being objectives.

Consultation and involvement

- 17 The Council drew on some of the engagement that was carried out by the PSB such as a community voices workshop that included representation from various seldom heard groups.
- 18 The Council also carried out its own engagement in two separate stages. First, it publicly consulted on its proposed priorities and then it consulted again on its draft Corporate Plan. It also held online workshops on topics such as Housing and

Education that were open to staff and members of the public. The Council then consulted again on its draft Corporate Plan.

- 19 In addition the Council held member workshops, a Youth Service workshop and liaised with partner organisations and sensory loss groups in the process of setting its latest well-being objectives.
- 20 A concerted effort was made to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders during the development of the Corporate Plan. Despite those efforts, the response rate was not high. A total of sixty seven responses were received commenting on the draft Corporate Plan. The Council mitigated this by requesting and collating anonymised recent engagement feedback, both from other public organisations and from other engagement carried out by the Council, to learn about a wider public view.

Planning to improve well-being

- 21 The Corporate Plan demonstrates that the Council has thought about how to take an integrated approach to developing its latest well-being objectives. The Council has clearly considered how each objective can contribute to the national well-being goals. The Council has also identified cross-cutting themes that impact across the well-being objectives that it has set.
- 22 The Corporate Plan also identifies other plans and strategies, both the Council's own, and those of other stakeholders, that relate to the respective well-being objectives. However, it is not clear how the Council considered the objectives of partnership organisations when forming its objectives, and to what extent there is alignment.

Planning to deliver/ delivering the well-being objectives

- 23 The Council has considered the long-term in developing its latest Corporate Plan. Each well-being objective sets out what the Council wants the future to look like. Under each objective there are steps to be delivered during the timespan of the Corporate Plan intended to contribute to that longer-term aim.
- 24 Aspects of the well-being objectives are designed to have preventative benefits. For example, the Council has committed to supporting the mental well-being of unpaid carers.
- 25 The Council states that when the Corporate Plan was adopted by the Council that all actions in it were resourced. The Council tries to consider any long-term resource risks through its corporate risk register. The Council produced the latest iteration of its Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) in December 2022. This is for a two year period and so is much shorter than the time period of the Corporate Plan. The MTFP contains a range of assumptions. We recognise that strategic financial planning is complex and challenging during this period of significant economic uncertainty.

- 26 Nevertheless, with the Corporate Plan covering a period of five years, it is important that the Council considers the resource implications of delivering its objectives over that term as far as is possible. The Council recognises this in its annual self-assessment where it states 'Developing medium and longer term financial strategies to ensure the Council improves its longer term alignment and allocation of resources is an area for further improvement'. The Council has also accepted previous Audit Wales recommendations to strengthen its MTFP. It has promised that a new MTFP covering the period up to 2027 will be approved by Members during 2023.
- 27 The Council is taking steps to mitigate the impact of its longer-term resource uncertainty. It is starting its business planning process earlier this year. It is also at an early stage in working towards improving its workforce planning.
- 28 The Corporate Plan contains various references to partnership working. However, the role of partners in helping to deliver the Council's objectives, and vice versa, could be more explicit.
- 29 The Council has told us that it no longer has the capacity to annually review whether each of its partnership arrangements are effective. But it has identified in its annual self-assessment that monitoring the effectiveness of its collaborative activity is an area for improvement.

Monitoring the well-being objectives

- 30 The Council has well-established mechanisms to monitor delivery of its well-being objectives. It produces six monthly performance reports and has six monthly service performance reviews. The performance reviews include how well the service is delivering its service plan objectives and they relate to the well-being objectives.
- 31 The Council has some measures that enable it to monitor progress over the short/medium and longer-term. For example, the climate change objective includes measures of '% Change in carbon emissions from our activities compared to base year' and 'Length of route in kilometres (KM) added to active travel'.
- 32 The Council is trying to draw on various sources of evidence for its performance measures. For example, it has a qualitative measure of analysing feedback from speaking with care home residents.
- 33 The Council recognises that it needs to continually review whether the measures under the well-being objectives are the right ones and enable them to report on outcomes. We are currently working on a project that will look in more detail at whether the Council's performance data enables senior leaders to understand the outcomes of its activities.
- 34 The Council has reflected on this round of setting its well-being objectives and intends to start the process earlier next time round as timescales were tight. The Council has not yet had the opportunity to specifically reflect on how it applied the

sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives and whether it can improve on that the next time it sets well-being objectives.

Recommendations

- R1 When setting future well-being objectives, the Council should build on the progress it has made in applying the sustainable development principle by more explicitly considering how the Council's work could support partners' objectives and vice versa

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. They are based on the positive indicators we have previously used in our sustainable development principle examinations, which were developed through engagement with public bodies and informed by advice and guidance from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. 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?

<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.

<p>Has the body considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>Has the body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>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?</p>	
<p>Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. • 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 development principle to setting its well-being objectives?</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. • 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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