

# Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – Pembrokeshire County Council

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## Report summary

- 1 We considered the service user perspective and outcome information provided to senior officers and senior members (senior leaders), and how this information is used.
- 2 Overall, we found that performance information provided to senior leaders does not generally enable them to understand the perspective of service users and the outcomes of the Council's activities. This restricts their ability to understand the impact of the Council's services and policies.
- 3 Our findings are based upon fieldwork we did between June and August 2023.
- 4 We have made three recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.

## What we looked at – the scope of this audit

- 5 We focused on the performance information provided to senior officers and senior members (senior leaders) about service user perspective and outcomes, and how this information is used. We did not undertake a full review of the Council's performance management arrangements or an in-depth review of the quality of the data that the Council collects. Neither did the review focus on engagement with service users on specific service changes or the development of policies and strategies.
- 6 We have set out our audit questions and audit criteria in **Appendix 1**. The audit criteria essentially sets out what good looks like and what we would expect to find.
- 7 Overall, we were looking for performance information to be shared with senior leaders to help them understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users and how well they are helping the Council to achieve the outcomes it is working towards. We were also looking to see that senior leaders use this information to monitor progress and take action where necessary to improve outcomes.
- 8 This is an important part of arrangements to ensure that councils are securing value for money in the use of their resources. It is also an important way in which the Council can assure itself that it is acting in accordance with the 'involvement' way of working in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives. Without this information, it is difficult to see how senior leaders can understand whether their policies and actions are having the intended impact and make changes where they are not.
- 9 Our findings are based on document reviews and interviews with the Cabinet Member, Director and senior officers with responsibility for the Council's performance management arrangements. The evidence we have used to inform our findings is limited to these sources.

- 10 We set out to answer the question ‘**Does the Council’s performance data enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of its activities to effectively manage its performance?**’ We did this by exploring the following questions:
- Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the perspective of service users?
  - Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the outcomes of the Council’s activities?
  - Does the Council have robust arrangements to ensure that the data provided is accurate?
  - Does the Council use the information to help it achieve its outcomes?
  - Does the Council review the effectiveness of its arrangements?

## Why we undertook this audit

- 11 This audit was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General’s duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 12 We sought to:
- gain assurance that the performance information the Council provides to senior officers and elected members enables them to understand the service user perspective and the outcome of its activities;
  - gain assurance that this information forms part of the Council’s arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources and its application of the sustainable development principle; and
  - identify opportunities for the Council to strengthen its arrangements.

## The Council’s performance reporting arrangements

- 13 The Council’s Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team consider a ‘corporate scorecard’ quarterly. Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives quarterly performance reports and scorecard reports that include details of service performance and some financial monitoring information. These reports give senior leaders and members of the scrutiny committee a high-level overview of the main performance issues, and the opportunity to monitor trends over time.
- 14 The Council published its first annual self-assessment report 2021-22 in October 2022, which outlines how well it has met performance requirements during that financial year and any actions it has taken or will take.
- 15 Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

## What we found

### **Performance information provided to senior leaders does not generally enable them to understand the perspective of service users and the outcomes of the Council's activities. This restricts their ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities**

#### **The performance information provided to the Council's senior leaders does not generally enable them to understand the perspective of service users**

- 16 The Council collects a small amount of performance information on the service user perspective, such as complaints and customer satisfaction data (for example, in relation to housing and its customer contact centre). However, this is not regularly reported to senior leaders and is not collected across all Council services.
- 17 The performance indicators included on the Council's corporate scorecard do not include information that would help senior leaders understand the service user perspective.
- 18 Overall, therefore, the Council cannot be assured that it understands the impact that its actions are having on service users.

#### **Performance information provided to senior leaders largely focuses on outputs and activities rather than evaluating their impact**

- 19 The Council's core performance reports, such as the corporate scorecard, provide a narrative of its activities and outputs as opposed to an assessment of progress against outcomes. This limits senior leaders' ability to assess if it is achieving its strategic objectives and to understand the impact of the Council's activities. The Council acknowledges that the link between its wellbeing objectives and its performance information is not clear.

#### **The Council does not have arrangements to ensure that its performance information reflecting the service user perspective and outcomes information is accurate**

- 20 The Council's individual service areas are each responsible for ensuring that their performance data is of sufficient quality and accuracy. However, the Council does not have arrangements in place to assure itself that this data is accurate.
- 21 The Council's Internal Audit service reviewed the Council's corporate performance management arrangements in April 2023, giving an overall rating of moderate

assurance. However, Internal Audit highlighted in its report that the Council did not have arrangements in place to verify data.

- 22 The lack of arrangements increases the risk that senior leaders may take decisions based on information that is inaccurate.

**As performance information provided to its senior leaders on outcomes and the perspective of service users is very limited, the extent to which the Council can use this information to help achieve its outcomes is also limited**

- 23 As set out above, our main finding is that performance information provided to senior leaders does not generally enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities. Therefore, it logically follows that the extent to which the Council uses that information to help it achieve its outcomes from this performance information is limited.

**The Council is reviewing the effectiveness of its arrangements but does not routinely seek to learn from other organisations about gathering the service user perspective**

- 24 The Council is in the process of reviewing its Corporate Performance Scorecard to ensure the measures contained in it are fit for purpose. This provides it with an opportunity to strengthen the information it provides to senior leaders on the service user perspective and outcomes.
- 25 The Council does not routinely compare its arrangements for collecting and reporting performance information on outcomes and the service user perspective with the approaches of other organisations. Doing this will help the Council understand and learn from how other organisations are using information on the service user perspective and outcomes. This is an important element of arrangements to secure value for money.

# Recommendations

## Exhibit 1: recommendations

- R1 Information on the perspective of the service user.
- The Council should strengthen the information it provides to its senior leaders to enable them to understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.

- R2 Information on progress towards outcomes
- The Council should strengthen the information provided to senior leaders to help them evaluate whether the Council is delivering its objectives and its intended outcomes.

- R3 Information on the quality and accuracy of data
- The Council needs to assure itself that it has robust arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of the service user perspective and outcomes data it provides to senior leaders.

# Appendix 1

## Key questions and what we looked for

### Exhibit 2: key questions and what we looked for

The table below sets out the question we sought to answer in carrying out this audit, along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

| Level 1  |  |
|--|--|
| Does the Council's performance data enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of its activities to effectively manage its performance? |  |
| Level 2  | Audit Criteria <sup>1</sup> (what we are looking for)  |
| 2.1 Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the perspective of service users?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The information is:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– relevant to the objectives the Council has set itself;</li><li>– sufficient to enable an understanding of the service user perspective;</li><li>– sufficient to provide an understanding of progress towards the outcomes the Council is planning to achieve;</li><li>– drawn from the diversity of service users including groups who share protected characteristics; and</li><li>– used to inform comparisons with the performance of similar bodies where relevant.</li></ul></li><li>• The Council has involved service users in determining which information to collect.</li></ul> |
| 2.2 Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the outcomes of the Council's activities?                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The information draws on a range of evidence sources to provide a holistic view of progress.</li><li>• The information enables senior leaders to monitor progress over the short, medium and long term.</li><li>• The information enables senior leaders to monitor the delivery of outcomes that cover multiple service areas and/or organisations.</li></ul>   |

<sup>1</sup> Our audit criteria have been informed by our cumulative knowledge of previous audit work, as well as the question hierarchy and positive indicators we have developed to support our sustainable development principle examinations.

## Level 1

Does the Council's performance data enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of its activities to effectively manage its performance?

## Level 2

### Audit Criteria<sup>1</sup> (what we are looking for)

2.3 Does the Council have robust arrangements to ensure that the data provided is accurate?

- The Council has clear arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of the data it provides to senior leaders.
- Where weaknesses in data quality are identified, the Council addresses them.

2.4 Does the Council use the information to help it achieve its outcomes?

- Where poor performance is identified, the Council uses the information to make changes/interventions.
- There is evidence of the Council improving its progress towards its outcomes as a result of interventions.

2.5 Does the Council review the effectiveness of its arrangements?

- The Council reviews the information provided to senior leaders to ensure it is appropriate and relevant.
- The Council compares the information it collects with the information collected by similar organisations to identify opportunities to strengthen its arrangements.





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