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# Well-being of Future Generations: An examination of 'Examination of The Green Council: maximising the recovery and recycling of waste' – **Flintshire County Council**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Jeremy Evans, Gwilym Bury and Charlotte Owen under the direction of Huw Rees.

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# Summary report

## Summary

### Why we undertook the Examination

- 1 In accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) the Auditor General for Wales (the Auditor General) is statutorily required to examine public bodies to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when:
  - a. setting their well-being objectives; and
  - b. taking steps to meet them.

The Act defines the sustainable development principle as 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'.

- 2 The Auditor General must provide a report on his examinations to the National Assembly for Wales at least a year before each Assembly election. The first such report must be published by 2020, before the 2021 Assembly election.
- 3 During 2018-19 the Auditor General is undertaking examinations across the 44 bodies covered by the Act to inform his report to the National Assembly.
- 4 In May 2018, the Auditor General published his report, **Reflecting on Year One – How have public bodies responded to the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015)**. He concluded that public bodies support the principles of the Act and are taking steps to change how they work.
- 5 In developing our approach to undertaking the examinations during 2018-19 we engaged with a range of stakeholders including through our pilot work during 2017-18. We also worked closely with the Future Generations Commissioner.
- 6 As the preliminary work in year one included a consideration of how public bodies had set their Well-being Objectives, the principal focus of this work is the way in which public bodies are taking steps to meet their well-being objectives.
- 7 The findings in this report are based on fieldwork that we undertook during the period September 2018 to October 2018.
- 8 This report sets out our findings from our examination of 'We [the Council] will maximise the recovery and recycling of waste', a step the Council is taking to meet its Well-being Objectives.
- 9 We asked the Council in October 2018 to respond to our findings so they could be included in this report and we received their action plan in early February 2019.

## What we examined

- 10 We examined the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle when maximising the recovery and recycling of waste. Flintshire County Council's Plan for 2017-18 includes a step to maximise the recovery and recycling of waste with a view to reducing the reliance on landfill. The step contributes towards Flintshire's 'Green Council' improvement priority.
- 11 The Council planned to meet the step by improving its recycling performance, modernising its Household Recycling Centre (HRC) site network and improving recycling rates at the HRCs.
- 12 Over recent years, the Council has made a number of changes to its waste recovery and recycling arrangements. These changes have led to improved recycling rates: the percentage of the county's waste which is reused, recycled or composted increased from 55% in 2012-13 to 68% in 2017-18. In 2017-18, the Council stopped collecting side waste and continued work to modernise its HRC network. In April 2018 it began charging for garden waste collection. We reviewed the processes the Council followed in deciding on and implementing these changes. This allowed us to assess the extent to which the Council considered the sustainable development principle.
- 13 In order to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle, public bodies must take account of the following 'ways of working':

### Exhibit 1: the 'five ways of working'

The table below sets out the 'five ways of working' as defined in the Welsh Government's **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Essentials**<sup>1</sup> document.

The Five Ways of Working
<b>Long term</b> The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
<b>Prevention</b> How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
<b>Integration</b> Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
<b>Collaboration</b> Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.

<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Essentials**, (2015).

## The Five Ways of Working

### Involvement

The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

- 14 Our examination found that: **The Council has mainly acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle in setting the 'step' and has generally taken account of the five ways of working in the actions it is taking to deliver it.**

# Detailed report

## Part One: Examination Findings

### The Council needs to do more to balance the current and long-term needs within the national and local context

#### What we looked for

- 15 We looked for evidence of:
- a thorough understanding of current and long-term needs and the associated challenges and opportunities;
  - planning over an appropriate timescale;
  - resources allocated to ensure long-term benefits; and
  - appropriate monitoring and review.
- 16 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for the 'long term' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.<sup>2</sup>

#### What we found

- 17 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council regularly reviews its approach to waste recovery and recycling to ensure that it is on track to meet its and the Welsh Government's medium-term targets;
  - income generated from garden waste collection charges is generating a surplus and will support the long-term sustainability of the overall waste service; and
  - the Council is working collaboratively on a north Wales Residual Waste Treatment Plant to provide longer-term solutions to dealing with its residual waste.
- 18 We identified the following area for improvement:
- there is a need to think longer term and for the Council to develop its own long-term waste strategy which takes into account national, regional and local needs, challenges and opportunities to help it deliver its 2025 aim of zero waste

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1.

## The Council understands the environmental and financial impacts of inaction and has considered how its actions can prevent these problems worsening

### What we looked for

- 19 We looked for evidence of:
- a thorough understanding of the nature and type of problem the step could help prevent from occurring or getting worse;
  - resources allocated to ensure preventative benefits will be delivered; and
  - monitoring and review of how effectively the step is preventing problems from occurring or getting worse.
- 20 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'prevention' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.<sup>3</sup>

### What we found

- 21 We identified the following strengths:
- the officers and councillors we spoke to have a good understanding of the need to maximise recycling to protect the environment, reduce landfill, and discourage fly tipping;
  - the Council is working with a local charity to re-use surplus items such as furniture presented at HRCs;
  - recycling officers are engaging with households and local schools to promote recycling and reduce residual waste; and
  - the Council is investing in its HRC network and has procured new recycling recovery vehicles to enable residents to recycle more.
- 22 We identified the following areas for improvement:
- although the Council regularly monitors the total amount of waste generated within the county and the proportion being recycled, it could take further action to further reduce overall waste volume; and
  - the Council could further improve the customer experience at HRCs with better support from staff.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1

The Council has considered how the step supports its well-being objective of a 'Green Council' and the Welsh Government's waste strategy, but it is not clear if the Council has actively considered how the step impacts on its other well-being objectives or those of other bodies

#### What we looked for

- 23 We looked for evidence of consideration of:
- how this step could contribute to the seven national well-being goals;
  - how delivery of this step will impact on the Council's well-being objectives and wider priorities; and
  - how delivery of this step will impact on other public bodies' well-being objectives.
- 24 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'integration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.<sup>4</sup>

#### What we found

- 25 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council has considered how the step could contribute to the seven national well-being goals;
  - the Council has considered how its actions to improve recycling rates will directly contribute to its focus on environmental management as part of its Green Council objective; and
  - the Council has considered how delivery of the step impacts upon the Welsh Government's Towards Zero Waste strategy and vision of a more sustainable Wales.
- 26 We identified the following areas for improvement:
- the Council should give more consideration to how it can integrate its well-being objectives and assess their impact on the well-being objectives of other bodies.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1.

## The Council is collaborating with key stakeholders across north Wales to deliver its objectives and recognises there is potential to work more closely

### What we looked for

- 27 We looked for evidence that the Council:
- has considered how it could work with others to deliver the step (to meet its well-being objectives, or assist another body to meet its well-being objectives);
  - is collaborating effectively to deliver the step; and
  - is monitoring and reviewing whether the collaboration is helping it or its stakeholders meet well-being objectives.
- 28 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'collaboration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.<sup>5</sup>

### What we found

- 29 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council is considering how it could work more collaboratively with other north Wales councils on a regional approach to waste and is also exploring potential partnerships with local companies.
  - there are positive examples of the Council collaborating with others to deliver the step, for example:
    - jointly procured waste treatment facilities for food and residual waste;
    - partnership with a local charity to reuse surplus furniture etc; and
  - the Council is working with others to help them deliver the actions that contribute to the step and to have the widest impact. Partners include WRAP<sup>6</sup> and the waste market place.
- 30 We did not identify any areas for improvement in this area.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> Waste Resources Action Programme – <http://www.wrap.org.uk/>

Whilst there are positive examples of stakeholder involvement, the Council could benefit from involving the public at an earlier stage and producing comprehensive equality impact assessments for all policy decisions on major service changes

#### What we looked for

- 31 We looked for evidence that the Council has:
- identified who it needs to involve in designing and delivering the step;
  - effectively involved key stakeholders in designing and delivering the step;
  - used the results of involvement to shape the development and delivery of the step; and
  - sought to learn lessons and improve its approach to involvement.
- 32 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'involvement' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.<sup>7</sup>

#### What we found

- 33 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council has engaged well with households and schools to educate citizens about the importance of recycling; and
  - when the Council involves stakeholders in the design and delivery of service changes, such as the HRC changes, it does so well and can evidence that stakeholders helped shape the final plans.
- 34 We identified the following areas for improvement:
- sometimes the Council may benefit from engaging with stakeholders earlier in the process. For example, by involving stakeholders in the early design stage of the HRC process, the Council may have avoided negative publicity and agreed on a final approach more quickly and easily.
  - a more consistent approach needs to be taken to completing comprehensive equality impact assessments (EIAs) and making them available to the decision-making process.
  - the councillors we spoke to reflected that, although they are confident that officers consider the WFG Act, this is not clearly demonstrated in the evaluation and reports they receive.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1.

## Part Two: Council's response and actions

35 Following the conclusion of our fieldwork we presented our findings to senior officers of the Council at a workshop in October 2018. At this workshop the Council began to consider its response to our findings and because of discussions at the workshop, and further reflection on our findings, the Council has developed the following actions under specific themes. We will continue to monitor the Council's progress in implementing their action plan, and the extent to which they address the issues we have identified in our findings.

### Exhibit 2: Council Actions

Sustainable Development principles	Opportunities for Improvement	Action response
<b>Long term</b>	There is a need to think longer term and for the Council to develop its own regional and local needs, challenges and opportunities to help it deliver its 2050 aim of zero waste.	This is embodied within the Council's five-year Waste Strategy.
<b>Prevention</b>	Although the Council regularly monitors the total amount of waste generated within the county and the proportion being recycled, it could take further action to reduce overall waste volume.	This is embodied within the Council's five-year Waste Strategy.
	Improve the customer experience at HRCs with better support from staff.	We will work with the Wales Audit Office on their Service User perspective at our HRC sites.
<b>Integration</b>	The Council should give more consideration to how it can integrate its well-being objectives and assess their impact on the well-being objectives of other bodies.	The Council will be re-setting its well-being objectives as part of the Council Plan setting, which will include not just the work led by the Council, but also consideration of partnership working and its impact on the well-being objectives of other bodies.

Sustainable Development principles	Opportunities for Improvement	Action response
<b>Involvement</b>	Sometimes the Council may benefit from engaging with stakeholders earlier in the process. For example, by involving stakeholders in the early design stage of the HRC process, the Council may have avoided negative publicity and agreed on a final approach more quickly and easily.	We will review where we have been successful in other involvement exercises to apply lessons learned to future policy reviews such as post-16 transport.
	A more consistent approach needs to be taken to completing comprehensive equality impact assessments (EIA) and making them available to the decision-making process.	The work undertaken on developing the EIA approach into a fully integrated impact assessment (including the well-being goals and sustainable development principles) will be launched in the new year for application to all policy review areas.
	Members we spoke to reflected that, although they are confident that officers consider the WFG Act, this is not clearly demonstrated in the reports we receive.	Completion of work being undertaken to incorporate the thinking behind the WFG Act within reports to Members.
<b>Corporate arrangements</b>	The Council needs to assure itself that it is considering the five ways of working in the actions it takes to achieve its well-being objectives.	This will be undertaken as part of the re-setting of the Council's well-being objectives.
	The Council needs to consider how to include a learning cycle to help it further embed the five ways of working in setting and delivering its well-being objectives.	Setting and delivery of the revised set of well-being objectives will be fully integrated with the five ways of working.

# Appendix 1

## Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

The table below sets out 'positive indicators' for each of the five ways of working that we have identified and will use to help inform our assessments of the extent to which bodies may be applying the SDP. We do not intend to use the indicators as a 'checklist'. They should be viewed as 'indicators' that will help us to form conclusions, rather than 'determinants' of the extent to which a body is acting in accordance with the SDP in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.

### Exhibit 3: Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

<b>What would show a body is fully applying the long-term way of working?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a clear understanding of what 'long term' means in the context of the Act</li><li>• They have designed the step to deliver the well-being objective/s and contribute to their long-term vision</li><li>• They have designed the step to deliver short or medium-term benefits, which are balanced with the impact over the long term (within the project context)</li><li>• They have designed the step based on a sophisticated understanding of current and future need and pressures, including analysis of future trends</li><li>• Consequently, there is a comprehensive understanding of current and future risks and opportunities</li><li>• Resources have been allocated to ensure long-term as well as short-term benefits are delivered</li><li>• There is a focus on delivering outcomes, with milestones/progression steps identified where outcomes will be delivered over the long term</li><li>• They are open to new ways of doing things which could help deliver benefits over the longer term</li><li>• They value intelligence and pursue evidence-based approaches</li></ul>
<b>What would show a body is fully applying the preventative way of working?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The body seeks to understand the root causes of problems so that negative cycles and intergenerational challenges can be tackled</li><li>• The body sees challenges from a system-wide perspective, recognising and valuing the long-term benefits that they can deliver for people and places</li><li>• The body allocates resources to preventative action that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and use of resources over the longer-term, even where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs</li><li>• There are decision-making and accountability arrangements that recognise the value of preventative action and accept short-term reductions in performance and resources in the pursuit of anticipated improvements in outcomes and use of resources</li></ul>

#### **What would show a body is taking an 'integrated' approach?**

- Individuals at all levels understand their contribution to the delivery of the vision and well-being objectives
- Individuals at all levels understand what different parts of the organisation do and proactively seek opportunities to work across organisational boundaries. This is replicated in their work with other public bodies
- Individuals at all levels recognise the cross-organisation dependencies of achieving the ambition and objectives
- There is an open culture where information is shared
- There is a well-developed understanding of how the well-being objectives and steps to meet them impact on other public sector bodies
- Individuals proactively work across organisational boundaries to maximise their contribution across the well-being goals and minimise negative impacts
- Governance, structures and processes support this, as do behaviours

#### **What would show a body is collaborating effectively?**

- The body is focused on place, community and outcomes rather than organisational boundaries
- The body has a good understanding of partners' objectives and their responsibilities, which helps to drive collaborative activity
- The body has positive and mature relationships with stakeholders, where information is shared in an open and transparent way
- The body recognises and values the contributions that all partners can make
- The body seeks to establish shared processes and ways of working, where appropriate

#### **What would show a body is involving people effectively?**

- Having an understanding of who needs to be involved and why
- Reflecting on how well the needs and challenges facing those people are currently understood
- Working co-productively, working with stakeholders to design and deliver
- Seeing the views of stakeholders as a vital source of information that will help deliver better outcomes
- Ensuring that the full diversity of stakeholders is represented and they are able to take part
- Having mature and trusting relationships with its stakeholders where there is ongoing dialogue and information is shared in an open and transparent way
- Ensure stakeholders understand the impact of their contribution
- Seek feedback from key stakeholders which is used to help learn and improve

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