



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
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Auditor General for Wales

Well-being of Future Generations – Ensuring preventative services target the most vulnerable families in Blaenau Gwent who do not meet the criteria for a care and support plan – **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Dave Wilson, Allison Rees, Lisa McCarthy, programmed managed by Non Jenkins under the direction of Huw Rees.

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Summary report

Summary

Why we undertook the Examination

1 In accordance with the Wellbeing 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 November 2018 to April 2019.

8 This report sets out our findings from our examination of *Flying Start, Families First, Early Years Childcare and Play ensuring preventative services target the most vulnerable families in Blaenau Gwent who do not meet the criteria for a care and support plan*, a step the Council is taking to meet its Wellbeing Objectives.

9 This report also sets out the Council's initial response to our findings.

What we examined

10 We examined the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle when *Flying Start, Families First, Early Years,*

Childcare and Play ensuring preventative services target the most vulnerable families in Blaenau Gwent who do not meet the criteria for a care and support plan.

- 11 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'¹ document.

The Five Ways of Working
Long-term The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
Prevention How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
Integration 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.
Collaboration 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.
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.

- 12 Our examination found that: **The Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle in setting the step 'Flying Start, Families First, Early Years Childcare and Play ensuring preventative services target the most vulnerable families in Blaenau Gwent who do not meet the criteria for a care and support plan' but there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working.**

¹ Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Essentials, Welsh Government (2015)

Part One – Examination findings

The Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle in setting the step ‘Flying Start, Families First, Early Years Childcare and Play ensuring preventative services target the most vulnerable families in Blaenau Gwent who do not meet the criteria for a care and support plan’ but there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working

The Council has a thorough understanding of the short and long-term issues and challenges but does not yet have a sustainable long-term strategy

What we looked for

- 13 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.
- 14 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for the ‘long-term’ that we have identified and used as part of this examination.²

What we found

- 15 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council uses research, such as the Cordis Bright report (2013) and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) when planning for the long-term;
 - the Council uses grant funding and partners’ funding streams well, for example, regeneration funding to establish a support worker role working

² See Appendix 1

specifically with Fathers and the Council is considering Big Lottery funding for play therapy to make a long-term difference to families; and

- re-referrals to Children's Social Services is reducing. Initial evidence that programme is working.

16 We identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- the Council has started to consider how it can ensure the long-term resilience of the early intervention and prevention work against the backdrop of short term and reactive funding;
- the Council's 'early intervention and prevention strategy' is in draft. The draft strategy is for three years only and currently has high-level actions;
- the Council does not yet have a long-term strategy; and
- the Council does not model the long-term costs of not intervening early to generate long term benefits.

The Council understands the needs of families and is working with them to limit or prevent problems escalating, but preventative programmes could be used more widely across Council services

What we looked for

17 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.

18 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'prevention' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.³

What we found

19 We identified the following strengths:

- officers we spoke to have an excellent understanding of the need to build more resilient families, protect children from adverse childhood experiences and reduce the need for statutory intervention;

³ See Appendix 1

- the Council is working with partner organisations to establish a multi-agency approach to support families in the community. A good example is Social Workers and psychology input available to all schools;
- the Council targets most vulnerable groups e.g. previous looked after children who become parents. These new parents are automatically included in Flying Start programme regardless of whether they live in one of the eight flying start areas;
- the Council established a 'Supporting Change Team' that works with high risk families; and
- all Families First families now have a Joint Assessment Family Framework (JAFF). This creates a more meaningful overview of the family's needs and strengths and better informs an intervention plan. It is reducing referrals and making it less likely that families will be overlooked. Officers now produce more bespoke family support packages.

20 We identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- the Council does not yet have the information showing cost savings from these prevention programmes, but it told us that a Families First cost saving tool is in development that might help with this;
- the Council could better use performance data to monitor progress and support continuous improvement as despite working to reach very vulnerable families, it is not yet clear how the Council will judge success of early intervention and prevention work;
- the draft early intervention and prevention strategy does contain performance measures but no targets highlighting the Council's ambition; and
- the prevention agenda is not well embedded in all Council services.

Whilst the Step links to strategies, it remains in the ownership of Children's Social Services; the Council needs to do more to harness the support of other directorates to support delivery

What we looked for

21 We looked for evidence 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.
- 22 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'integration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁴

What we found

- 23 We identified the following strengths:
- effective working relationships in the Council's Children's Services;
 - early intervention and prevention is a fundamental part of the Public Service Board (PSB) well-being objectives – 'everyone has the best start in life'. There has been consideration of the seven national wellbeing goals;
 - draft early intervention and prevention strategy aligns with:
 - Taking Wales Forward 2016-2021 This plan sets out clear aims for giving every child in Wales the best possible start in life, and for supporting families to create stable, nurturing environments in which children can thrive;
 - Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACES) Public Health Wales supports the need for early intervention and prevention; and
 - Cymru Well Wales - First 1000 days. The First 1,000 Days (F1000D) of being a parent are now accepted to be the most significant in a child's development.
- 24 We identified the following opportunities for improvement:
- ownership of this Step remains clearly within Children's Social Services suggesting that the Council has not yet taken the opportunity to harness wider Council resources to plan and deliver the Step.

Collaborative working is a key component of the Council's early intervention and prevention approach but is aware it has more to do

What we looked for

- 25 We looked for evidence of:
- consideration of 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);
 - effective collaboration to deliver the step; and

⁴ See Appendix 1

- monitoring and reviewing whether the collaboration is helping it or its stakeholders to meet well-being objectives.
- 26 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'collaboration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁵

What we found

- 27 We identified the following strengths:
- prevention and early intervention is a fundamental part of the PSB's priority for 'every child to have the best possible start in life'.
 - the Council is collaborating with a range of external partners so that families can access the support they need. For example:
 - psychologist recruited to provide support to support workers to joint assess referrals;
 - Gwent Police looking at how police respond to calls concerning vulnerability and the subsequent action of the Police; and
 - health is the biggest partner with Flying Start – any new births are identified by Health administration and Flying Start informed – Flying Start don't miss any families eligible for services.
- 28 We identified the following opportunities for improvement:
- A F1000D planning group (established in Sept 2018) made four recommendations to PSB in October 2018 that remain outstanding:
 - establish a F1000D Community of Practice in Blaenau Gwent;
 - explore how there could be more horizontal alignment and integration between the F1000d services so that they operate more like a programme or a system, rather than separate services;
 - explore the scale of need for enhanced services for families outside of Flying Start areas in Blaenau Gwent; and
 - consider a range of solutions to addressing recruitment and retention issues in the Blaenau Gwent health visiting service.
 - Blaenau Gwent Early Years Development, Childcare and Play Partnership has not yet created a F1000D Community of Practice where good practice can be shared and collaborative approaches planned, implemented and evaluated. The partnership is well-attended by all the specialist services that play a role in F1000D.

⁵ See Appendix 1

The Council can demonstrate some strengths in its approach to involving parents and other stakeholders; there are areas which the Council could further strengthen

What we looked for

- 29 We looked for evidence of:
- identifying who it needs to be involved in designing and delivering the step;
 - effectively involving key stakeholders in designing and delivering the step;
 - using the results of involvement to shape the development and delivery of the step; and
 - learning lessons and improve its approach to involvement.
- 30 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'involvement' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁶

What we found

- 31 We identified the following strengths:
- parent forums in community hubs act as listening posts and inform future work;
 - closed group on Facebook for parents. A voice for parents;
 - Early Years Development Childcare Play Partnership (EYDCPP) is a strategic partnership of early years and prevention within councils and is a sharing network. There is, a 'before and after' evaluation with feedback shaping changes in service delivery;
 - independent evaluation by Worcester University on Families First programme: spoke to local users, and feedback on the Programme was very positive; and
 - Blaenau Gwent PSB organised a F1000D Systems Engagement event in July 2018. 13 partner organisations represented – 91 delegates.
- 32 We identified the following opportunities for improvement:
- the Council could do more to involve children and families in need that aren't living in Flying Start areas that require early intervention or preventative services to stop problems escalating;
 - the Council has not yet fully implemented recommendations for the Families First programme (Worcester University evaluation):

⁶ See Appendix 1

- further consider the sustainability of Families First, particularly in relation to gains made by families; and
- consider how to best support families to develop their own resilience and create community networks. Engage with partners to discuss.
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Part Two – Council’s response

- 33 Following the conclusion of our fieldwork we presented our findings to the Council at a workshop in April 2019. The Head of Service, Service Manager for Flying start, Childcare Early Years and Play, Service Manager for locality teams, Service Manager for Families First, Safeguarding IAA and 14 plus Team, Service Manager for Placement Team, Supporting Change and Contact Team, Team Manager Families First, Team Manager Flying Start and Corporate Performance Officer attended the workshop.
- 34 At this workshop the Council began to consider its response to our findings and discussions at the workshop and after further reflection on our findings, the Council has developed the following actions.

Involvement

- Community:
 - Create community engagement role – collaborate with agencies and parents in a local primary school (Families First).
 - Consider ways to use the information gathered in the population needs assessment to target community engagement.
 - Workshop to develop an understanding of the needs of the community to ensure we are delivering appropriate services.
 - Building on the independent evaluation of Families First we are using the same model to evaluate Supporting Change Team’s first year and also engaging families in the evaluation of IAA.
 - Families First Steering Group – improve group participation/collaboration.
- Peers:
 - Police work with Families First – changing the way Police work with vulnerability – resources
 - Consider ways to engage wider council in ‘outcomes’ and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) models of working
 - Consider partners and how we engage them in ‘outcomes’ models of working.

- Step down model reviewed and in place – FF/SSD.
- Work with Regional Adoption Service to manage/support exit from care.

Collaboration

- Take forward F1000D actions. Co-construction Programme.
- Present to Regional Partnership Board (RPB) the need to raise the profile of numbers of looked after children and include in Regional Plan.
- Space Well-being:
 - Clear data set to evidence what difference the panel is/will be making, set targets, long-term and short-term measures.
 - Evidencing a fast response to referrals due to panel being weekly.
 - Use Distance travelled tools.
 - Evidencing the system change by reduction of re-referrals.
 - Gain a clearer/more in-depth understanding of what each agency can provide.

Long term

- The Council needs to develop a long-term Early Intervention & Prevention Strategy. Corporate Leadership Team to discuss and agree a way forward.
- Use the Children and Communities Grant to meet the long-term priorities of the Council. Idea: role out of Flying Start across the Council.
- Ensure we look wider with partners eg the Transformation Fund in Health.
- Working with other authorities to develop long term solutions to priorities.
- When reviewing the Looked After Children Reduction Strategy look to longer-term: ten years plus.

Integration

- Shared Council vision of what we are trying to do/Council wide goal congruence. Bottom up rather than top down (models to be developed).
- Council wide survey to establish how well people understand the vision and their contribution to it.
- Space Well-being:
 - Roles/responsibilities, multi-agency sign-up, pan-Gwent. Use as a flagship for goal congruence.
 - Children and Community Grant (an integration of seven grants coming together) allowing flexibility of how the money is used to achieve wellbeing.

Prevention

- Develop a data set to evidence the success of Flying Start and Families First.
 - Develop a system to demonstrate cost savings from prevention programmes.
 - Review the Prevention & Early Intervention Strategy to become long term.
 - Define what long term vision looks like in both strategies.
 - Raising community aspiration.
 - Take advantage of the amalgamation of the various grants.
 - Continue to evaluate Effectiveness of Supporting Change Team. Adapt practice in other teams to build on learning from success in other teams. Embed and develop the outcomes training using the Mentoring Scheme.
 - Embed the Cost Saving Tool across preventative services. Evaluation information to inform future practice/resources (nationally).
- 35 We may monitor the Council's progress in implementing these actions and the extent to which they address the issues we have identified in our findings.

Appendix 1

Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

Exhibit 1: Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

- 1 The table below sets out 'positive indicators' for each of the five ways of working that we have identified. We have not used the indicators as a checklist. They should be viewed as indicators. They helped us to form conclusions about the extent to which a body is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its Well-being Objectives.

What would show a body is fully applying the long-term way of working?

- There is a clear understanding of what 'long-term' means in the context of the Act.
- They have designed the step to deliver the well-being objective/s and contribute to their long-term vision
- 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).
- They have designed the step based on a sophisticated understanding of current and future need and pressures, including analysis of future trends.
- Consequently, there is a comprehensive understanding of current and future risks and opportunities.
- Resources have been allocated to ensure long-term as well as short term benefits are delivered.
- There is a focus on delivering outcomes, with milestones/ progression steps identified where outcomes will be delivered over the long-term.
- They are open to new ways of doing things which could help deliver benefits over the longer term.
- They value intelligence and pursue evidence-based approaches.

What would show a body is fully applying the preventative way of working?

- The Council seeks to understand the root causes of problems so that negative cycles and intergenerational challenges can be tackled.
- The Council sees challenges from a system-wide perspective, recognising and valuing the long-term benefits that they can deliver for people and places.
- The Council 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.
- 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.

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

What would show 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 sources 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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