

# Setting of Well-being Objectives – North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

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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 56 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<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>2</sup>. We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025<sup>3</sup>.
- 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 Authority must take account of the five ways of working: long term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention<sup>4</sup>.
- 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

## Carrying out our examination at North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
  - explain how North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) applied the sustainable development principle throughout in the process of setting its well-being objectives;
  - provide assurance on the extent that the Authority applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
  - identify opportunities for the Authority 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 Authority 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 Authority put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
  - Has the Authority considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
  - Has the Authority 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 Authority and we tailored the delivery to reflect its specific circumstances. We completed the fieldwork for this review between October and November 2024.
- 9 We gathered our evidence in the following ways:
  - reviewing key documents; and
  - conducting interviews with key people involved with setting the well-being objectives.

## How and when the Authority set its well-being objectives

- 10 The Authority commenced work on setting new well-being objectives during 2023 then published its new objectives in March 2024. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.
- 11 The Authority published its well-being objectives as part of its Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

## Exhibit 1: North Wales FRA well-being objectives 2024 to 2029

### **Our People Principle**

Being in the right place, at the right time, with the right skills.

Ensuring a highly skilled workforce by recruiting, developing and retaining a motivated and bilingual workforce that represents and champions the diversity of the communities we serve.

### **Our Prevention Principle**

Working with partners to help make communities safer.

Reducing risks to our communities, especially for those people who may be more vulnerable, through our established intervention programmes such as Safe and Well Checks and the Phoenix Project.

### **Our Protection Principle**

Making businesses safer together.

Providing businesses with expert guidance on fire protection to help ensure the safety of buildings, employees, and customers, thereby supporting businesses to grow. High-risk buildings are prioritised for inspections, contributing to overall public safety.

### **Our Response Principle**

Providing an effective emergency response.

Being ready to respond when you need us: to protect what matters to you, to save lives, reduce harm, and protect homes and businesses.

### **Our Environment Principle**

Protecting and preserving our natural environment for future generations.

Adopting eco-friendly practices in our daily operations to cut down on carbon emissions and other environmental impacts and raise environmental awareness amongst our staff and our communities.

## What we found

### The Authority has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives

#### The Authority applied the principle but did not fully consider how to align its objectives with others

- 12 The Authority has learnt from previous corporate plans to improve how it applies the sustainable development principle. The CRMP is a deliberately longer-term plan than previous annual improvement plans<sup>5</sup>. The change followed internal reflections on previous plans. For example, the Authority tried to focus objectives more on the fire and rescue sector and make them easier to understand. This demonstrates a positive approach to learning that helps support the Authority's application of the sustainable development principle.
- 13 The Authority used a range of data and intelligence to draft its CRMP. The Authority used its analysis of the strategic operating environment and forecast demand data to inform its objectives. This included a range of risk areas, such as culture, finance, and demographic change. It also applied learning and analysis completed for its Emergency Cover Review, completed earlier in 2023. The Authority has also used its internal intelligence to ensure departmental objectives align to the Authority's throughout the organisation. Overall, this meant the Authority had a clear evidence base for its objectives throughout the organisation.
- 14 However, the Authority did not fully consider how it could align its objectives with other public bodies to maximise impact. The Authority did not complete an analysis of how it could maximise shared areas of focus with other public bodies when developing its own objectives. It did, however, align each objective to national well-being goals and include Public Service Board (PSB) objectives within the CRMP. This means that, whilst aware, the Authority did not fully consider their objectives relationship with other bodies. We recognise the difficulty the Authority faces from having multiple PSBs to align with. Doing this could reduce the risk of partners delivering actions that duplicate or counteract the Authority's actions.
- 15 Whilst the Authority looked to involve residents in its process, it did not receive a representative response. Following internal development, the Authority consulted the public for 12 weeks. It promoted its consultation through leaflets, social media, and through emails via the Authority's stakeholder register. In total, the Authority received 223 responses, of which 48 (22%) were from Authority officers. The demographic profile of respondents suggests that the full diversity of the population

<sup>5</sup> A change in Welsh Government guidance supported this change to ensure the Authority discharges its duty to set annual improvement objectives under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

served may not have been reached by the consultation. For example, only two responses were made in the Welsh language. This could mean that the impact of the Authority's objectives on some communities may not be fully understood, potentially limiting its success.

- 16 The Authority did, however, draw on public views from other sources. As the Authority had significant public engagement during the Emergency Cover Review, it was able to use this intelligence to inform the CRMP. Officers noted that whilst this was beneficial overall, the closeness in timing to the Review did mean that there was some confusion from the public during its CRMP consultation, further limiting its reach. The Authority gained more public views by meeting community groups across North Wales. Effective involvement helps bodies ensure they consider the opinions of the diverse communities served and includes them in delivery.

### **The Authority has not resourced its delivery to meet its objectives**

- 17 The Authority has deliberately lengthened its planning approach to apply the sustainable development principle more clearly in the medium term. Annually, it also intends to publish an implementation plan that sets out actions for the year. This approach demonstrates the Authority taking a longer-term view. However, by setting objectives over a longer time period, such as over a decade or more, this may have supported an even clearer strategic direction. This may enable more challenging objectives to be successfully delivered by the Authority, as well as align with the principle.
- 18 However, the Authority had a limited consideration of how it will resource and respond to risks to ensure it can deliver its objectives. The Authority did not assess or allocate the required resources to deliver actions within the CRMP. Whilst officers showed awareness of some risks and impacts of not clearly resourcing plans, it means that there may be uncertainty in how realistic and deliverable the plan is. Understanding the financial, human, and other resources required to deliver a plan is critical to ensuring successful implementation. By detailing how the Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget are directed towards the achievement of well-being objectives, for example, it enables resources to be clearly directed to key priorities. Since fieldwork, officers have developed a business case approach to include well-being and departmental objectives. This is subject to approval in March 2025.
- 19 Similarly, the Authority demonstrates awareness of collaboration but has not detailed how it will support delivery to achieve its objectives. Officers outlined the forums attended with public sector partners. Whilst some forums have a clear, statutory purpose that relates to fire and rescue work, the Authority has not clearly linked this work to the achievement of its objectives or set this detail out in supporting delivery plans. As a result, it is not clear how the Authority understands what will be delivered in partnership across objectives. Consequently, it is not clear how the Authority assures itself about the contribution and accountability of



partners. As outlined above (paragraph 14), understanding and coordinating actions with partners can help to maximise the impact achieved. Having a planned approach to collaboration helps partners understand their responsibilities, their commitment, and then to be accountable for outcomes.

## **The Authority lacks measures to understand progress towards its objectives**

- 20 Performance measures are not in place to understand progress towards objectives. Current reporting focuses on recording activity rather than their outcomes and impact on the community, Authority, and objectives. The CRMP only includes the statutory indicators prescribed by the Welsh Government, which are not linked to the Authority's objectives. Having clear, measurable outcomes helps the Authority assure itself of its performance and take mitigatory action if performance trends in the wrong direction.
- 21 However, the Authority has developed monitoring committees for each objective to monitor progress. For two objectives, multiple committees are listed as being responsible for monitoring progress, which may lead to duplication or confusion over coverage.
- 22 Departments have a clear process for recording their actions quarterly. The process drives reporting to the Senior Leadership Team and the Executive Panel. Performance is then reported to all members of the Authority annually. This provides a clear process for reporting activity.

## **Recommendations**

### **Opportunities for future planning**

- R1 The Authority should build on progress it has made in applying the sustainable development in the setting of its well-being objectives by:
  - 1.1 More clearly considering and demonstrating alignment with partner objectives to maximise impact of shared objective areas.
  - 1.2 More clearly outlining how the actions to meet its well-being objectives will be delivered in partnership with others.
  - 1.3 Considering and developing more effective involvement opportunities to ensure the full diversity of the community served is represented.

### **Delivery of the current plan**

- R2 The Authority should use its implementation plan to strengthen the alignment between its financial and corporate planning, such as its Medium Term Financial Plan, so that it can ensure actions are resourced to achieve its well-being objectives over the medium term.

**Monitoring the current plan**

- R3 The Authority should strengthen its performance management arrangements to develop and report against strategic outcome measures aligned to its well-being objectives so that it can effectively measure progress against them, rather than reporting activity.

# 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.

<b>To what extent has the Authority acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives</b>
<b>Planning: Was the process the Authority put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?</b>

<p><b>Has the Authority used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Authority has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the Authority's understanding of the 'as is'/ short-term need.</li> <li>• The Authority 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"> <li>– Public Services Boards' well-being assessments</li> <li>– Regional Partnership Boards' population assessments</li> <li>– The results of local involvement/consultation exercises</li> <li>– Service monitoring and complaints</li> <li>– Future Trends report</li> <li>– Natural Resources Wales' State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales and Area Based Assessments</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Authority has sought to understand the root causes of problems so that it can address negative cycles and intergenerational challenges through its well-being objectives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Has the Authority involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Authority 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.</li> <li>• Involvement reflects good practice and advice from the Future Generations Commissioner.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Has the Authority considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• The well-being objectives have been designed to reflect and capitalise on the connections between different areas of work.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<b>Has the Authority designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority has set objectives that are sufficiently ambitious and have been designed to drive activity across the organisation.</li> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<b>Resourcing and delivery: Has the Authority considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?</b>	
<b>Has the Authority considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources have been allocated to ensure the objectives can be delivered over the short and medium term, but the Authority has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives.</li> <li>The Authority has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.</li> </ul>
<b>Has the Authority considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Authority is drawing on its knowledge of partners' objectives/activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.</li> </ul>

**Monitor and review: Has the Authority put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?**

<b>Has the Authority developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, eg by focusing on outcomes that cut across departmental/organisational boundaries and deliver multiple (including preventative) benefits over the longer term.</li><li>• There is a 'golden thread' that will allow the Authority to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.</li></ul>
<b>Is the Authority seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Authority 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.</li><li>• The Authority 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.</li><li>• The Authority has or plans to reflect on how it has applied the sustainable development principle in this round of setting well-being objectives.</li></ul>





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