

Setting of Well-being Objectives – Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

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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 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 goals¹. 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 objectives². We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025³.
- 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 prevention⁴.
- 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 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
- explain how 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 in addition to the above.

How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 10 The Council commenced work on setting new well-being objectives during 2023 then published its new objectives in April 2024. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.
- 11 The Council published its well-being objectives in its Corporate Plan, which included the elements required for its well-being statement, as required by the Act. The Corporate Plan 2024–2030 can be viewed on the Council’s website⁵. These elements relate to how objectives contribute to the national well-being goals,

⁵ [‘Working with our Communities’, Rhondda Cynon Taf Council’s Corporate Plan 2024-2030, published April 2024](#)

incorporating the sustainable development principle, how they involve the diversity of the local population and how it will resource and monitor progress.

Exhibit 1: Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) County Borough Council's well-being objectives 2024-2030

1. People and Communities - Supporting and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.

2. Work and Business - Helping to strengthen and grow RCT's economy.

3. Nature and Environment - A green and clean RCT that improves and protects RCT's environment and nature.

4. Culture, Heritage and Welsh language - Recognising and celebrating RCT's past, present and future.

What we found

The Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives and has considered how they will be resourced over the medium term, but there is scope to improve monitoring of longer-term outcomes

The process for setting the well-being objectives

Planning process and evidence base

- 12 The Council drew on a wide range of evidence when setting its well-being objectives, to gain a good understanding of current need, risks and opportunities. The Council considered internal and external data sources, previous consultations and conducted extensive analysis to identify and address gaps between existing strategies and the proposed objectives.

- 13 The Council reviewed a range of datasets from sources including census information, Office for National Statistics, Future Trends Report⁶, Nomis, the Welsh Government, and third sector sources. The Council has begun to deepen its understanding of population needs in areas like health, by drawing on health determinants research⁷, in collaboration with health and academia partners, to strengthen its evidence base. Combining external data with its own internal data has enabled the Council to improve its understanding of future needs and challenges. The Council made effective use of Equality Impact Assessments as a key tool to undertake meaningful data analysis on how a diverse range of groups may be affected by each objective.
- 14 The Council considered other public sector partners' data in developing its well-being objectives but could make more use of this. This includes making more of the regional population needs assessment and Public Services Board well-being assessments and building up its evidence base for nature and environment, particularly biodiversity data.
- 15 However, we found that there was less use of data in relation to the Council's culture, heritage and Welsh language well-being objective. There are opportunities to further improve data forecasting at a local level in this area to quantify longer-term challenges.
- 16 The Council took account of the risks set out in its corporate risk register when it determined its well-being objectives. There continues to be a strong alignment between ongoing strategic risks and well-being objectives.
- 17 The Council considered its performance against its previous well-being objectives during the planning stage and as part of its 2022-23 self-assessment. However, whilst the Council reflected on its progress, we found that the Council could develop evaluation of the outcomes further. Providing further clarity on the overall progress against each of the well-being objectives would provide the Council and the public with a clearer understanding of how much work there is to do to complete their objectives. This would help inform the Council's future well-being objective setting decisions and allocation of resources.

Consultation and involvement

- 18 The Council considered feedback from previous consultations in developing its new well-being objectives. This included consultations on budget setting, the local development plan, the Council's Flood Risk Strategy and Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board's well-being assessment. These views acted as the basis for its further consultation.
- 19 The Council carried out extensive and meaningful activities to involve others in developing its well-being objectives. There were two phases to this engagement,

⁶ [Welsh Government, Future Trends: 2021, December 2021](#)

⁷ [Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council, Health Determinants Research](#)

the first beginning in September 2023 using digital engagement platforms. The second phase began in December 2023, incorporating community engagement alongside further digital engagement once objectives were further developed.

- 20 Externally, this included engaging with businesses, the third sector, town and community councils, the Public Services Board, and other local forums. Building on the work of previous consultations, the Council made efforts to involve under-represented groups to ensure it considered a diverse range of views. Particular emphasis was placed on including those with protected characteristics, although the Council has acknowledged that not all groups contributed, with less feedback received from race and disability groups.
- 21 The Council also had regular meetings with the Future Generations Commissioner and Trade Unions, who had the chance to feed back views directly to the Chief Executive.
- 22 Internal voices were also an important aspect of planning its well-being objectives for the Council. Workshops were held with Chief officers, allowing them to input into the well-being objectives based on their experiences in their respective services. An annual survey of staff allowed staff to feed in their views.
- 23 Using an existing digital engagement channel via the ['Let's Talk about what matters to you' web page](#), the Council kept residents updated with each stage of consultation and the lifecycle of current plans, using quick polls and asking for more in-depth ideas. Information on the page is clear and manages expectations about budget restraints. 87% of respondents to the main consultation on draft objectives thought areas of focus were 'about right' or 'correct but could be improved' showing public support for the plan.
- 24 The Council incorporated stakeholder feedback into its draft well-being objectives and, through further consultation, made effective use of involvement activity to further refine proposals. Each of the objectives in the Corporate Plan include a summary titled 'What matters', demonstrating how they link citizen input with individual objectives. One example of embedding feedback is the renaming of an objective to include the Welsh language based on specific feedback from Welsh language groups.

Planning to improve well-being

- 25 The Council has set ambitious well-being objectives which extend over a longer six-year timeframe than the previous four-year plan. The Council has been clear it wants to remain ambitious to enable it to respond to longer-term challenges like climate change. In its Corporate Plan, it has set out high level outcomes the Council expects to see over the longer term (2030).
- 26 The Council's four well-being objectives align closely with the seven national well-being goals. The Corporate plan references national legislation and policy drivers that helped inform each objective. The Council added 'Culture, heritage and Welsh language' as a standalone well-being objective in response to feedback received in

the well-being objectives consultation. This is aligned with the Welsh Government's Welsh language strategy, which aims to achieve a million Welsh speakers by 2050.

- 27 When planning its well-being objectives, the Council ensured its own objectives support wider partnership objectives, as evident with the strong correlation with the Cwm Taf Public Services Board's well-being plan.
- 28 The Council considered the well-being objectives of neighbouring councils at a high level, with some limited consideration of how they could align. Further collaboration with partners when setting well-being objectives would help identify further opportunities to work together and allow the Council to gain a deeper understanding of how partner activity might affect the implementation of its own objectives. The Future Generations Commissioner has brought together well-being objectives from across Wales as a resource to help bodies do this.
- 29 The Council is mindful of how its well-being objectives impact on each other, with many examples throughout the Corporate plan of actions that are cross-cutting. However, there are opportunities to strengthen links between its Culture, Heritage and Welsh language objective with other objectives.

Plans to deliver the well-being objectives

- 30 The Council has demonstrated how it will resource aspects of its well-being objectives over the short and medium term to cover the period of the plan. It has a medium-term financial strategy that aligns with its objectives and dedicated reserves available for workstreams which support objectives. Quarterly performance reports include a section showing how investment priorities link with each objective, progress updates against each investment area and the value of the investment. The Council has continued to invest in areas to help meet its well-being objectives.
- 31 The Council acknowledge there are significant longer-term financial resource risks that could delay successful delivery of its well-being objectives. There are, however, examples of the Council investing in longer-term preventative activities, such as in its leisure facilities and activities designed to help reduce crime and improve school attainment levels.
- 32 Information about how the Council intends to resource its Culture, Heritage and Welsh language objective is more limited. For example, there is limited data available in the quarterly performance report to show the level of investment planned compared to other objectives.

Monitoring the well-being objectives

- 33 The published Corporate Plan shows high level outcomes the Council expects to see over the longer term (2030). The Council regularly monitors progress against the plan through quarterly performance reporting and annual self-assessments. For each objective, the performance report shows work carried out against the sustainable development principle with a more detailed progress update containing

qualitative and quantitative information, against each of the seven national well-being goals, under the heading 'outcomes, progress and challenges'. Each objective is supported by a comprehensive action plan, each showing the priority area, delivery actions, milestones, sub-actions, delivery date, responsible officer, progress against target (RAG) and a summary of progress. The majority of actions show the Council is on target to achieving them.

- 34 Challenge sessions are held on the Directorate Self-assessments which involve the Chief Executive, Directors and Heads of Service. These feed into future delivery plans. Current performance measures allow the Council to assess progress of individual actions in the short term but there is less commentary on how much overall progress has been made to achieve the objectives and what the overall impact is. In our Financial sustainability review⁸ we recommended that the Council should ensure it understands the impact its transformation programmes will collectively have on its budget gap over the medium to long term; and strengthen its evaluation and reporting of the impact delivered programmes have had on its budget, local communities and the achievement of its corporate objectives.
- 35 The Council has sought to learn lessons from previous well-being objective setting rounds through improved gap analysis, realignment of strategic priorities against corporate objectives, and has improved how it embeds these in its performance monitoring framework. The Council further identified opportunities to strengthen involvement activity by following up with organisations who did not engage with consultations to explore the reasons behind this.

Recommendations

R1 We found there are opportunities for the Council to build on the progress to date when monitoring their well-being objectives. The Council should:

- evaluate the overall progress against each well-being objective to help inform the public on the level of progress against each well-being objective, and help inform the setting of future objectives.

R2 We found there are opportunities to improve data and alignment of the Culture, Heritage and Welsh language well-being objective. The Council should:

- build on the evidence base that supports the objective by using all available datasets; and

⁸ Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council – Financial Sustainability Review, Audit Wales, August 2024

- look for further areas of alignment with other well-being objectives to maximise the value from the Culture, Heritage and Welsh language objective on other objectives.

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, eg 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.

Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?

- 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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