

Use of Performance Information: Service User Perspective and Outcomes – Monmouthshire County Council

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Report summary

- 1 We considered the service user perspective and outcome information provided to senior officers and senior members (senior leaders), and how this information is used.
- 2 Overall, we **found the Council provides some performance information to enable senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users, but information on outcomes is limited restricting their ability to manage performance effectively.**
- 3 We have made three recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.
- 4 Our findings are based on fieldwork we did during June and July 2023.

What we looked at – the scope of this audit

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

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

Why we undertook this audit

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

The Council's performance reporting arrangements

- 13 The Council has set out six key objectives in its Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28. The Council has set out a range of measures and milestones that it uses to help it evaluate its progress against these objectives.
- 14 The Council produces quarterly, and six-monthly performance reports, and annual self-assessment reports, which cover the Council's financial and service performance and progress towards its well-being objectives. The Council also uses service plan dashboards to help it monitor its performance. The Director of Social Care and Health, and Chief Officer, Children and Young People also produce annual reports.
- 15 These reports provide the main opportunity for members and senior leaders to understand how well the Council is performing.

- 16 The Council published its Annual Self-Assessment 2021-22 in October 2022. Prior to this, the Governance and Audit Committee considered it in September 2022, in keeping with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. The document was approved by full Council in September 2022. The Council published its 2022-23 self-assessment report in October 2023. It was, reported to Governance and Audit Committee, and Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee in September 2023.
- 17 Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

What we found

The Council provides some performance information to enable senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users, but information on outcomes is limited restricting their ability to manage performance effectively

The performance information provided to senior leaders includes some information on the perspective of service users, but does not enable them to get a comprehensive understanding of the perspective of service users

- 18 Overall, we found some examples of performance information which would help senior leaders understand the perspective of service users.
- 19 For example, the Council's Self-Assessment Report 2022-23 includes information, such as the percentage of adult service users who are happy with the care and support received and high-level feedback from the Nature Isn't Neat Survey.
- 20 The Council also reports case studies and complaints information to the Performance and Overview Scrutiny Committee, although these do not necessarily provide a representative picture of the service user perspective.
- 21 Information on the service user perspective is also seen in the Social Care and Health: Director's reports 2021/22 and 2022/23, such as feedback on the Early Help, Therapeutic and Well-being Services, and Longer-Term Care and Support. We also saw examples of service user related performance information included in the 2023 Annual report of the Chief Officer: Children and Young People. There are also some service user related measures within the dashboards and the Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28
- 22 However, overall, we found that the information on the perspective of service users did not enable senior leaders to get a comprehensive understanding of how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users, particularly given the breadth of services provided.

Performance information provided to senior leaders to help them understand the outcomes of the Council's activities is limited

- 23 Whilst we found some information about outcomes in the Council's performance reports, overall, much of the information focused on outputs and activities.
- 24 For example, in its Self-assessment report 2022-23, the Council has included information about the impact of the work of the Building Stronger Families team and the provision of reablement packages. The Council also draws on the well-being information from the Office of National Statistics's Annual Population Survey. In its Corporate Plan, the Council has also identified a series of broader and longer-term outcomes measures, such as health expectancy, which it will monitor. There was also some outcomes information in the 2023 Annual report of the Chief Officer: Children and Young People.
- 25 However, much of the information in the Council's reports is focused upon outputs and quantitative measures with limited evaluation of the outcomes of its actions. This affects senior leaders' ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities and whether it is meeting its objectives.

The Council has limited arrangements to ensure performance data reflecting the service user perspective and outcomes information is accurate

- 26 The Council has limited arrangements in place to routinely check the accuracy and quality of data and performance information relating to outcomes and the service user perspective.
- 27 The Council has a Performance Measures Guidance, which sets out its principles for developing and checking performance measures. The guide outlines the steps to take to ensure data is accurate. The Council trusts its staff to be familiar with the performance data they are reporting and how this is collected.
- 28 The Council's central performance team undertakes sense checks of data, to understand and check anomalies in performance. However, inaccuracies with performance information may not be identified if anomalies were not noted. This does not, therefore, constitute robust arrangements to check the accuracy of the performance information. Or that services are following the steps set out in the Council's Performance Measures Guidance.
- 29 Internal Audit had previously carried out annual data quality audits up until 2019. At that time, Internal Audit had found that data quality arrangements had been strengthened so further reviews were not needed. However, there has been no data quality audits in the past four years.
- 30 As the Council has limited arrangements to assure itself that service user perspective and outcomes data is accurate, there is a risk that performance information presented to senior leaders may be inaccurate and that actions may be taken on the basis of inaccurate information.

As information provided on outcomes is limited, the extent to which the Council can use this information to help it achieve its outcomes is also limited

- 31 As set out above, our main finding is that the Council provides some performance information to enable senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users, but information on outcomes is limited. Therefore, it logically follows that the extent to which the Council uses the service user perspective and outcomes information to help it achieve its outcomes from this performance information is relatively limited.
- 32 Where we did find examples of the Council providing information on the perspective of service users and outcomes, we found some examples of the Council then using this information to make changes. For example, changes within the Council's housing support service, and work with housing associations to increase social housing opportunities to reduce homelessness.

The Council recognises that it needs to strengthen the quality and range of information available to it, to better understand the perspective of service users and outcomes

- 33 The Council set new objectives in its Community and Corporate Plan 2022-28 with a focus on developing more localised data, to better understand the lived experiences of its residents.
- 34 In its Performance Measures Guidance, the Council also emphasises that in designing meaningful measures, services should consider user needs, the outcomes the service is trying to achieve, and information it needs to understand the effectiveness of the service. It is evident from the Council's Self-Assessment Report 2022-23 and other reports as mentioned earlier that the Council has incorporated some service user perspective information.
- 35 The Council is reviewing its performance dashboards, including the Policy, Scrutiny, and Customer Experience dashboards. This presents an opportunity to enhance information for senior leaders, helping them understand the service user perspective and outcomes.
- 36 The Council has taken steps to try to understand how some other organisations are collecting performance information, for example around poverty and inequality. However, it does not routinely compare its data collection methods for service user perspective or outcomes with similar organisations. We do not mean comparing performance per se, but to help it learn how other organisations are providing information about service user perspectives and outcomes to help strengthen its own arrangements.
- 37 It will be important for the Council to benchmark and compare its performance arrangements for collecting and reporting on outcomes and service user perspectives with other organisations. This is an important element of arrangements to secure value for money.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

R1 Information on the perspective of the service user

- The Council should strengthen the information it provides to its senior leaders to enable them to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.

R2 Information on progress towards outcomes

- The Council should strengthen the information provided to senior leaders to help them understand the impact of its services and evaluate whether it is delivering its long-term objectives and intended outcomes.

R3 Information on the quality and accuracy of data

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

Appendix 1

Key questions and what we looked for

Exhibit 2: key questions and what we looked for

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

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

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

Level 1

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

Level 2

Audit Criteria¹ (what we are looking for)

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

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

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

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

2.5 Does the Council review the effectiveness of its arrangements?

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



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