

Wellbeing Objective Setting Examination – Torfaen 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 Torfaen County Borough Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - explain how the Council applied the sustainable development principle at key points 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 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 carried out the examination in ‘real time’, undertaking the work while the Council was in the process of setting its well-being objectives. This allowed us to observe key parts of the process, gaining valuable insight and audit evidence.
- 10 In addition to observing meetings, we:
 - reviewed key documents;
 - ran a workshop with key people who were involved with setting the well-being objectives; and
 - carried out a small number of interviews in addition to the above.

How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 11 The Council commenced work on setting new well-being objectives during 2022 then published its new objectives in December 2022. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.
- 12 The Council published its well-being objectives as part of its County Plan, which included its well-being statement that is required under the Act. The well-being statement and County Plan 2022-2027 can be viewed on the Council’s [website](#).

Exhibit 1: the Council's well-being objectives 2022-2027

We will raise educational attainment, helping young people and adults to gain the qualifications and skills needed to lead positive lives.

We will encourage and champion children, young people and families so they can thrive.

We will tackle inequality by focusing on early identification and prevention activities that support people to live independent and fulfilling lives.

We will make Torfaen more sustainable by connecting people and communities, socially, digitally and physically.

We will respond to the climate and nature emergencies, recycle more and make improvements to the local environment.

We will make Torfaen a great place to do business by working with local employers, encouraging new business start-ups and entrepreneurial activities.

We will support and promote healthier lifestyles in Torfaen to improve mental and physical well-being.

We will support our local culture and heritage and make Torfaen a thriving, safe and attractive place to live and visit.

We will provide efficient customer focused services that reflect the way people live their lives and wish to access services.

What we found

The Council has considered the many ways that it can apply the sustainable development principle throughout the process of setting its new well-being objectives. However, there is more work for it to do to evaluate the progress it is making towards delivering its well-being objectives

Findings

- 13 The Council has given priority to planning and developing its County Plan 2022-2027 and its new well-being objectives. The Well-being Statement 2022-2027 describes how it has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle.
- 14 The Council is clearly committed to improving the process for setting its new well-being objectives by learning from its previous experience. For example, the Council has described some reflections on what did/did not work well and applied that learning to this round of objective setting and has put the sustainable development principle at the centre of the development of the County Plan 2022-2027.
- 15 The Well-being Statement 2022-2027 demonstrates that the Council has considered the longer term in developing each of its well-being objectives. For example, it describes how the Council has taken the information in the Future Trends Report into account in determining some of the drivers affecting the County Borough, such as population composition, poverty and health inequalities and technology.
- 16 The Council has developed its new well-being objectives based on a good understanding of current risks and opportunities and has drawn on many sources of information such as the Public Services Board's well-being assessments, Future Trends report, Welsh Report of the Climate Change Risk and the results of local consultation.
- 17 To inform the setting of the objectives, the Council held a series of engagement sessions including with Cabinet; an all-members seminar, a cross-cutting scrutiny session and with partner organisations. It also held a public consultation, involving an online survey and in-person drop-in session during November 2022. The Well-being Statement 2022-2027 provides further detail in relation to each objective as to who has been engaged and involved in their development.
- 18 The Council has designed the well-being objectives to be cross-directorate in terms of their planning and delivery. The purpose of this is to strengthen collaboration and involvement, and to promote cross-organisation dependencies and ownership of achieving the objectives. For example, the Children and Young People's

Development Plan and the Economy and Skills Service Delivery Plan are instrumental to the delivery of many of the well-being objectives.

- 19 There is an understanding of how the well-being objectives relate to what other public bodies are seeking to achieve and of furthering opportunities to work together. For example, the Gwent Public Services Board of which the Council is a statutory member has adopted the 'Marmot Principles', a set of guiding principles that forms a framework for reducing health inequalities.
- 20 At the time of our fieldwork, the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) considered the priorities determined by the Council and published in its Corporate Plan 2019-2023. The MTFP has since been revised and updated to reflect the new well-being objectives as set out in the County Plan 2022-2027, and to cover the same time period. The Council underwent a budget consultation process to help shape its MTFP and help prioritise its resource allocation in alignment with its well-being objectives. The Council's MTFP contains a range of assumptions, however, we recognise that strategic financial planning is complex and challenging during this period of significant economic uncertainty.
- 21 The Council has designed steps to deliver its well-being objectives and contribute to its long-term ambitions. We consider that the Council has taken a reasonable approach by designing an annual, rolling delivery plan that sits within the County Plan 2022-2027 to manage and mitigate financial and workforce risks that might impact on the delivery of the objectives.
- 22 The County Plan 2022-2027 includes some measurable activities and milestones in the annual delivery plan. At the time we conducted our fieldwork, new governance and reporting arrangements were being put into place. For example, officers were designing and refining a new performance management framework, and reporting templates were being developed albeit still at an early stage. Whilst the evolving performance report we reviewed commented on progress in relation to the specific activities set out in the annual delivery plan, such commentary was not evaluative and nor did it inform a broader view of the contribution made towards progressing its objectives over the longer term covered by the Plan.
- 23 The Council has yet to fully design and implement its regular monitoring and scrutiny arrangements of its County Plan and well-being objectives and is still developing the range and quality of the information it needs to robustly self-evaluate progress. There is more work for it to do to marshal, challenge and present this information both internally and in the public domain if it is to be able to clearly demonstrate the progress it is making towards delivering its well-being objectives over the longer term.

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. It also includes some 'positive indicators' that have been tailored to this examination, adapted from those we have previously used to inform our sustainable development principle examinations. 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?	
Has the body used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?	Positive indicators <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

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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.

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?

Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?

- 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.

Has the body considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?

- 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.

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?

Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?

- 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

- 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.

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?

development principle to setting its well-being objectives?

- 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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