

The Setting of Well-being Objectives – Wrexham 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 goals.¹ 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.² We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025.³
- 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 prevention.⁴
- 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 Wrexham

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - explain how Wrexham County Borough Council's (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 Wrexham 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 Wrexham 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 conducted a series of internal workshops with officers and Members between September and December 2022 to develop a draft Council Plan and objectives.
- 11 They followed this with a public engagement exercise between January and March 2023.
- 12 Following a Council review of its budget position during the Summer of 2023, the draft Council Plan and objectives were accepted by Executive Board in November 2023 and Full Council in December 2023.

Exhibit 1: the Council's well-being objectives 2023-2028

1. Delivering efficient street scene services and decarbonising our environment
2. Developing our economy
3. Ensuring Wrexham is a fair and safe place
4. Improving education and learning
5. Promoting good health and well-being (with a focus on social services and good mental health)
6. Supporting a highly skilled and engaged workforce, focusses on delivering services

What we found

The Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives, supported by a broad evidence base

The process for setting well-being objectives

Findings

Evidence base and improving well-being

- 13 The Council used a wide range of internal and external data to inform the development of its objectives.
- 14 Internally, the Council reviewed the previous Council Plan and objectives to understand progress made and conducted a series of workshops with officers, Chief Officers and Members.

- 15 Externally, data came primarily from the Public Services Board's (PSB) Wellbeing Assessment, along with the Regional Partnership Board's (RPB) Population Needs Assessment, Welsh Government's Future Trends report and a review of assessments and strategic plans from regional and national partners.
- 16 Initially, the Council relied on the engagement activity conducted by the PSB and RPB to ensure that the views of residents were considered. Subsequently, the Council conducted its own engagement activity on the draft Council Plans and objectives between January and March 2023, timed so it did not clash with the PSB engagement activity. This included an online survey, in-person engagement sessions and targeted sessions to ensure residents with protected characteristics were included.
- 17 The online survey received responses from 285 residents and the wider engagement work involved 18 groups, including those representing children and young people, older people and services providing health and well-being support to residents. The Council additionally met with community groups representing Town and Community Councils, Trades Unions, young people and the North Wales Multicultural hub, and also attended two community events. This activity added to the evidence base available to the Council but would have further strengthened it with a higher response rate for the online survey.
- 18 The range of evidence and data considered in preparing the Council Plan and objectives gives assurance that the process was well informed of the current needs and circumstances of residents, the key challenges and demands they face, and how these might change over time.
- 19 The Council has considered how its objectives can have a broad impact and deliver long-term benefits. All internal engagement activity emphasised consideration of the sustainable development principle when drafting the objectives and the Council used its Strategic Equality Plan as part of the evidence base and also completed an Equality Impact Assessment on the draft plan.
- 20 The Council Plan also includes a section identifying how each well-being objective links with the national well-being goals set by Welsh Government.
- 21 The Council links its plan with its long-term vision, which looks forward 15 years, and identifies the outcomes for each objective five years forward. Additionally, based on learning from the previous Council Plan, the planning of a proportion of activity will be agreed on a year-to-year basis, rather than profiled over five years. This will allow the Council the flexibility to review progress annually and respond to changes in resourcing and the impact of external factors when planning activity for the next year.

Resources and partnership working

- 22 The Council has considered resources and working in partnership to deliver its objectives, although it has not identified funding for all planned activity. The Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) states that additional funding was found to support investment in some of its objectives in the 2023/2024 budget and that current and

future budget decisions will be made based on supporting further investment in delivering its objectives.

- 23 The Council also told us that they are introducing a new change management process to support their decision-making processes around identifying cost savings and understanding the impact of these decisions on the delivery of its well-being objectives.
- 24 The Council provided evidence for a range of partnership working to support the delivery of its objectives. It identifies potential partners to support the delivery of its objectives in its outcome measures and supports service areas to develop partnership arrangements through its Partnership Toolkit, a document that is included in the Council's Financial Regulations.
- 25 The Council Plan also states that "...collaboration with our partners, businesses and communities will allow us to achieve our visions...".

Monitoring, evaluation and learning lessons

- 26 The Council has arrangements in place to monitor activity and improve how it sets its objectives.
- 27 All objectives are supported by outcome measures, which include a rationale for the objective, baseline data and targets for year one and year five of the Council Plan. Targets are a combination of activities, service developments and tasks. Each objective is also supported by context measures which show progress against targets that sit outside of the direct influence of the Council.
- 28 Reporting on progress is provided to Priority Boards and Members on a quarterly basis, to Scrutiny and Executive Board every six months, and the first annual report due in Summer 2024.
- 29 The Council is using opportunities to learn from and improve how it sets its objectives. It reviewed the previous plan and objectives before starting the process of renewing them and has timetabled annual reviews of activity and progress against the current objectives.
- 30 The format of the engagement activity on the draft objectives was changed from the previous plan, with sessions being based in the venues regularly used by groups as opposed to being held in Council venues. This change improved the engagement with the public.
- 31 The Council are part of the North Wales Research and Insight Group, which has been set-up to support the research and data activity of the PSB. This group will review the assessment process, which informed the evidence base for the objectives.
- 32 The Council's processes and activity provide assurance that it is measuring and monitoring performance appropriately and learning lessons from how it has set its objectives.

Recommendations

Balancing short-term needs with long-term goals

When reviewing the Council Plan and well-being objectives on an annual basis, the Council should ensure that activity and outcomes set on an annual basis remain aligned to the delivery of the longer-term outcomes in the Council Plan.

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.

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, e.g., 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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