

Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – Flintshire 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 that limited performance information is provided to senior leaders at Flintshire County Council (the Council) to enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of its activities.
- 3 We have made three recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.

What we looked at – the scope of this audit

- 4 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.
- 5 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.
- 6 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.
- 7 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.
- 8 Our findings are based on document reviews and interviews with the Cabinet Member and senior officers with responsibility for the Council's performance management arrangements. The evidence we have used to inform our findings is limited to these sources. We undertook this work during July and September 2023.
- 9 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

- 10 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.
- 11 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

- 12 The Council's Cabinet, Chief Officer Team and Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive six-monthly performance reports that include details of service performance, progress towards well-being objectives and financial monitoring information. These forums also receive various annual performance reports. These include the Council's Annual Self-Assessment, complaints report and the Director of Social Services' report.
- 13 Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

What we found

Limited performance information is provided to senior leaders to enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities

Senior leaders are provided with limited performance information to help them understand the perspective of service users

- 14 The Council does not include information about the perspective of service users within the performance information presented to senior leaders as a matter of course. We saw some limited examples where the Council's senior leaders are provided with information which gives an insight into the perspective of service users. These included the survey of housing tenants and the youth

justice survey. There is evidence that the Council analyses the feedback it receives on these services according to groups sharing protected characteristics.

- 15 The Council's Cabinet and Scrutiny report templates have a section titled 'consultation required / carried out', but apart from one instance, this is used to just note consultation, rather than provide information to help senior leaders understand what this tells them about the perspective of service users.
- 16 The Council has drafted a document 'How Achievements will be Measured' to accompany its 2023-28 Council Plan. However, only one of the 154 measures within this document relates to the service user perspective. This indicates that the limited insight could continue into the new reporting arrangements for the Council's latest well-being objectives.
- 17 Overall, the information the Council provides to senior leaders about the service user perspective is limited. It is, therefore, difficult to see how senior leaders would be able to understand from this information how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.

Information provided within performance reports to senior leaders largely focuses on activities, limiting their ability to understand the outcomes of these activities

- 18 Overall, the information provided to senior leaders is mainly focused on activities rather than outcomes. This limits senior leaders' ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities and whether it is meeting its objectives.
- 19 The measures the Council has drafted to monitor progress with its new Council plan only include limited information which could help senior leaders understand the outcomes of its activities.
- 20 We found some limited examples where information is provided about outcomes. As noted in paragraph 16, the Council's youth justice service performance report provides senior leaders with a detailed insight into the impact of its activities. The Council also shares outcomes from complaints investigations and interventions with senior leaders.

The Council does not have arrangements to routinely check that data about service user perspective and outcomes is accurate

- 21 The Council has limited arrangements to ensure that the data provided to senior leaders is accurate. Individual service areas are responsible for their own data accuracy arrangements, but the Council provided no examples to show that these arrangements included checking the accuracy of information about the perspective of service users. The Council's corporate team sense-check data, for example to understand any anomalies in performance, but this does not check that the information provided to senior leaders is accurate.
- 22 As a result, there is a risk that the Council may take decisions and action, and allocate resources based on inaccurate information.

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

- 23 As set out above, our main finding is that performance information provided to senior leaders does not enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities. As a result, it logically follows that the extent to which the Council uses this information to help it achieve its outcomes is also limited.
- 24 We could see that the Council had made changes at an operational level following information shared within its complaints reports, but this is a limited example.

The Council does not review the effectiveness of its performance reporting arrangements in relation to service user perspective and outcomes

- 25 Although the Council has identified in its recent Annual Governance Statement and Annual Self-Assessment that it has limited insight into service user perspective, it has not reviewed the information provided to senior leaders to ensure it is appropriate and relevant.
- 26 The Council does not compare the type of information it collects or collection methods on service user perspective or outcomes with the information collected by similar organisations. We do not mean comparing the Council's performance as such, but to help it learn how other organisations are providing information about service user perspectives and outcomes to help strengthen its own arrangements. This is an important element of arrangements to secure value for money.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

Information on the perspective of the service user

- R1** The Council should strengthen the information it provides to its senior leaders to enable them to understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.

Outcomes information

- R2** The Council should strengthen the information provided to senior leaders to help them evaluate whether the Council is delivering its objectives and the intended outcomes.

Arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of data

R3 The Council needs to assure itself that it has robust arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of the data it provides to senior leaders relating to service user perspective and outcomes.

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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