

Setting of well-being objectives – Flintshire County Council

Audit year: 2022-23

Date issued: June 2024

Document reference: 4310A2024

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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.

Carrying out our examination at Flintshire County Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - explain how Flintshire applied the sustainable development principle throughout in the process of setting its well-being objectives;

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

- provide assurance on the extent that Flintshire applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
 - identify opportunities for Flintshire 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 Flintshire 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 Flintshire put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
 - Has Flintshire considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
 - Has Flintshire 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 Flintshire 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 interviews with council officers.
- 10 As part of the review of key documents, the Council was unable to provide detailed evidence of how it plans to fund the delivery of its well-being objectives and how it manages arrangements for working with partners and identifying opportunities for collaboration. This means our findings for Questions 2 of the audit criteria (see **Appendix 1** for details) are limited due to the lack of evidence provided.

How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 11 The draft Council Plan, containing its objectives, was submitted to Cabinet in January 2023 for approval at Full Council in May 2023. As of March 2024, the plan and objectives had not been published online.
- 12 The Council Plan contains seven well-being objectives, which the Council calls priorities. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.

Exhibit 1: Flintshire’s well-being objectives 2023/28

1. Poverty – Protecting our communities and people from poverty by supporting them to meet their basic needs and to be resilient

2. Affordable and Accessible Housing – Housing in Flintshire meeting the needs of our residents and supporting safer communities

3. **Green Society and Environment – Limiting and enhancing the impact of the Council’s services on the natural environment and supporting the wider communities of Flintshire to reduce their own carbon footprint**

4. **Economy – Connecting communities and enabling a sustainable economic recovery and growth**

5. **Personal and Community well-being – Supporting people in need to live as well as they can**

6. **Education and Skills – Enabling and supporting learning communities**

7. **A well-managed Council – A responsible, resourceful and trusted Council operating as efficiently as possible**

What we found

The Council has applied the sustainable development principle in part to the setting of its well-being objectives, but it did not directly involve its residents in the process and has not identified the resources required to deliver its objectives

The process for setting well-being objectives

Findings

- 13 Development of the new council plan began in July 2022. The Council reviewed the previous plan and objectives and identified if objectives could be removed from the new plan or considered for continued inclusion.
- 14 The Council used a wide range of internal and external data to inform its evidence base for developing its Council Plan and well-being objectives. This included the Public Services Board’s (PSB) Well-being Assessment and the Regional Planning Board’s (RPB) Population Needs Assessment, as well as the Welsh Government’s Future Trends report and other regional and national assessments. This means that the Council had a good understanding of need, risk and opportunities when developing its well-being objectives.
- 15 The Council ran a series of internal workshops with service managers, chief officers, Directors, and Members to involve them in the development of the new plan and objectives. Chief officers reviewed the evidence base and developed a draft plan and objectives. These were challenged by Scrutiny Committees before final review and amendment by chief officers and service leads.

- 16 The Council did not directly involve residents in developing its well-being objectives, neither did it consult them on its draft objectives. However, it did use secondary sources of engagement evidence included in the assessment processes completed by the Public Services Board and the Regional Planning Board. These engagement processes included the views of residents, community cohesion groups and third sector organisations. When next setting well-being objectives, the Council should consider how it can involve the diversity of its communities as part of the process.
- 17 In developing its Council Plan, the Council has considered how it can work with partners and this is reflected in the objectives and steps included within them.
- 18 The Council's evidence base included a review of the strategies and organisational plans of external partners to identify links between these and the draft objectives drawn up by the Council.
- 19 The approved version of the Council Plan contains details and proposed activity on each objective, which includes listing opportunities for working with external partners to support delivery of activity to achieve the objectives.
- 20 The Council Plan also lists the national priorities of external partners that could be impacted by the Council achieving its own objectives.
- 21 The Council has a range of processes in place to support the delivery of its objectives. The Council has seven priorities, each one supported by a well-being objective. Each objective contains a number of sub-priorities, with each of these containing a range of outputs (activities, tasks and service delivery) and measures (looking at how much activity has taken place and what impact it has achieved). All this information is included within the published version of the Council Plan.
- 22 The majority of activities listed under each sub-priority, 124 of the 169, are due to be complete in 2024, although many of them are part of wider activity that will continue during the lifetime of the plan and have a longer-term focus. For instance, the Council's short-term activity to review its Flood Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Flood Consequences Assessment is due to be completed by June 2024 but will influence how the Council manages flood risk in the long-term.
- 23 The remaining 45 actions cover the last four years of the plan. The Council will need to continue developing actions that will help deliver the objectives beyond the current year, given the plan extends to 2028.
- 24 We were unable to conclude what arrangements the Council has in place to resource its well-being objectives because of a lack of evidence provided to us by the Council..
- 25 When submitting the plan for approval, the Council's papers stated that 'Resource implications have been considered during preparation of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme and will continue to be monitored during the regular budget monitoring and financial review arrangements.' We have not seen evidence of this during our review. If the Council is unable to resource the full range of activity identified in its well-being objectives, it risks not being able to deliver its Council Plan or meet its objectives
- 26 The Council has developed arrangements to allow it to monitor the progress and impact of activity over the short, medium, and long-term. Progress against delivery of the well-being objectives is reported quarterly to the Council's Chief Officer Team (COT), Cabinet and Full Council. Scrutiny Committees receive reports on their relevant sub-priorities. The measures used are a mix of outputs and outcomes, showing both the volume of activity and its impact. These show progress against each sub-priority. This includes a Red / Amber / Green status and updated data (where available) and a written update for all sub-priorities.

- 27 This reporting includes the highlighting of sub-priorities which are not on target and the identification of new risks. Either of these triggers a highlight report, which includes context and identifies the potential risk associated with not delivering the sub-priority, along with proposed actions to improve performance.
- 28 There is scope for the Council to take a more formalised approach to learning and improving how it develops its objectives and Council Plan.
- 29 We are aware that it has participated in equivalent exercises for the PSB Well-being assessment and the RPB Population needs assessment. And, as noted above, the Council also undertook a review of the previous Council Plan
- 30 However, gaps in the wider evidence provided to us indicate that there are weaknesses in how the Council manages its records and retains material from internal activity. This means it is missing out on opportunities for learning.

Recommendations

R1 When it next develops its well-being objectives, the Council should ensure they are informed by the views of the diversity of its population to ensure the plan is informed by the full views of the local community.

R2 When developing future well-being statements, the Council should set out how it proposes to ensure resources are allocated annually for the purposes of taking steps to meet its objectives to ensure these are achievable.

R3 The Council should ensure that in future budget setting processes or when refreshing its medium-term financial plan there is clear alignment with the Council well-being objectives, and that there is clarity about how savings targets or known future financial uncertainty might affect the delivery of its well-being objectives.

R4 To ensure that the Council can evaluate processes and identify lessons for learning, it should consider its arrangements for document retention and management covering how it gathers and stores information relating to the setting of well-being objectives and lessons learned.

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?

Question 1. 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?

- 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:
 - 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.

Has the body involved others in developing its well-being objectives?

- 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>Question 2. 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.

Question 3. 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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