

Use of performance information: Service User perspective and Outcomes - Bridgend County Borough 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 the Council's performance information does not enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective, which is restricting their ability to understand the impact of their services and policies.
- 3 We have made two recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.
- 4 Our findings are based on fieldwork we did between April and May 2023. We shared the draft report with the Council at the end of June and discussed our findings with the Council in 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 the Cabinet Member, Director and senior officer with responsibility for the Council's performance management arrangements. 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

- The Council produces quarterly performance reports that include details of service performance and progress towards its well-being objectives. The reports are reported to Cabinet and the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Council also discusses performance at its Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) meetings. These are not public meetings. They are attended by the Council's Corporate Management Team, Cabinet, Scrutiny Chairs and political group leaders.
- The Council published its Annual Self-Assessment 2021-22 in October 2022. Prior to this, the Governance and Audit Committee considered it in June

2022, in keeping with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021

- Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

What we found

The Council's performance information does not enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and progress towards intended outcomes, restricting their ability to understand the impact of the Council's services and policies

The performance information provided to senior leaders does not enable them to understand the perspective of service users

- 13 The performance information provided to senior leaders, in quarterly performance reports and through the Council's self-assessment process, does not reflect the service user perspective. Therefore, the Council cannot be assured that it understands the impact that its services and policies are having on service users.
- 14 The Council acknowledges that the service user perspective is not well represented in its current performance reporting arrangements.
- 15 The Council is in the process of developing its new corporate plan and performance indicators to support its new wellbeing objectives. As part of that process, the Council has acknowledged that previous performance indicators were not always well-aligned with its objectives. This assessment corresponds with the findings in our previous report on Performance Management arrangements at the Council.¹
- 16 The Council has recently made amendments to its quarterly performance reports so that they now include a section on consultation and engagement. However, in many instances, this section just lists the consultation and engagement activity that has taken place. It does not consistently reflect on the findings or set out what impact the consultation and engagement activity has had to enable senior leaders to understand the perspectives of its service users.

Performance information provided to senior leaders largely focuses on outputs and activities rather than evaluating their impact

- 17 The performance information the Council reports publicly and in its Quarterly Performance Assessments contains some information about outcomes. However,

¹ [Bridgend County Borough Council – Performance Management Review 22 March 2023](#)

much of the information is focused upon outputs and quantitative measures. This limits senior leaders' ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities and whether it is meeting its objectives.

The Council does not have arrangements to ensure that the performance data reflecting the service user perspective and outcomes information is accurate

- 18 In our March 2023 report on the Council's performance management arrangements, we reported that the Council did not have robust and consistent arrangements to ensure the quality of its data.
- 19 This review has also found that the Council's data quality arrangements do not cover the service user perspective and outcomes information.
- 20 This means that when performance information is presented to senior leaders it may be inaccurate which increases the risks of action being taken and resources deployed on the basis of inaccurate information.
- 21 In May 2023, a report on Performance Management by the Council's Internal Audit service gave a rating of reasonable assurance, but identified issues around the accuracy of performance indicator data. For example, the report recommended that checks should be made to verify the accuracy of the data prior to submission, and that formulae should be reviewed to ensure accuracy for reporting purposes.
- 22 The Council is taking steps to address our and Internal Audit's recommendations in this area.

As the 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 previously, 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. 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 limited.

The Council recognises that it needs to improve the quality and range of information available to it to better understand the service user perspective and outcomes of its activities

- 24 As part of the development of its new corporate plan, the Council is currently reviewing the performance information it provides to senior leaders.
- 25 The Council has developed a plan to address the recommendations in our March 2023 report. This plan was reported to the Governance and Audit Committee on 27 April 2023.
- 26 The Council has developed a performance management improvement plan and a new performance management framework. These seek to address many of the issues that we raised in our previous report on performance management and set out the Council's aspiration to place greater emphasis on outcomes information and to take greater account of the views and experiences of service users. However, it is too early for us to evaluate the impact of these changes.
- 27 It will be important for the Council to ensure that it benchmarks and compares its arrangements for collecting and reporting performance information on outcomes and the service user perspective with the approaches of other organisations. This is an important element of arrangements to secure value for money. Doing this will also help the Council understand and learn from how other councils are providing information on service user perspective and outcomes. We hope to be able to provide some examples in our national summary report following the completion of our work at other councils

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 understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.
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- R2 Information on progress towards outcomes
- The Council should strengthen the information provided to senior leaders to help them evaluate whether the Council is delivering its objectives and its intended outcomes.

R3 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 perspective 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 ² (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.

² 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 Criteria² (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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