

Setting of Well-being Objectives – Bridgend County Borough Council

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Background: our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives

- 1 Under section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Auditor General has a duty to examine the extent to which the public bodies covered by the Act, have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives and taking steps to meet them¹.
- 2 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.² They must also take all reasonable steps, in exercising their functions, to meet those objectives.
- 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.³
- 4 The Auditor General must undertake an examination in each body at least once over each five-year reporting period, the current reporting period is May 2020 to May 2025.⁴
- 5 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.
- 6 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 Section 15 (1) (a) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

² 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.

³ Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

⁴ 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.

Carrying out our examination at Bridgend County Borough Council

- 7 The aim of this examination was to assess the extent to which Bridgend County Borough Council has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives.
- 8 The examination was designed to help:
 - provide assurance on the extent that the Council has applied the sustainable development principle in setting its well-being objectives; and
 - identify opportunities to further embed the sustainable development principle in the setting of well-being objectives in future.
- 9 We set out to answer the question ‘to what extent has the Council applied 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?
- 10 We delivered this piece of work initially through our regular liaison meetings with officers during Spring/Summer 2023. The final set of interviews were concluded in May 2024.
- 11 We gathered our evidence by building on the work of the Assurance and Risk Assessment. This was supplemented in the following ways:
 - reviewing key documents;
 - focus group with graduates; and
 - carrying out a small number of interviews with officers and Members.

How and when Bridgend County Borough Council set its well-being objectives

- 12 The Council commenced work on setting its well-being objectives during 2022. The Council published its well-being objectives in March 2023. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.

Exhibit 1: Bridgend County Borough Council well-being objectives 2023-28.

A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable

A County Borough with fair work, skilled, jobs and thriving towns

A County Borough with thriving Valleys communities

A County Borough where we help people meet their potential

A County Borough that is responding to the climate and nature emergency

A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community

A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives

- 13 The Council published its well-being objectives as part of its Corporate Plan 2023-2028 (the Plan) which is available to view on Bridgend County Borough Council's website. Under the Act, public bodies must have a well-being statement. This does not need to be a separate document and can be included within a public body's corporate plan (or equivalent). Bridgend County Borough Council's Corporate Plan 2023-28 also acts as the Council's well-being statement. It includes many of the legislative requirements however, not all elements are fully covered, as follows:
- why the public body considers it has set well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle and
 - how it proposes to ensure that resources are allocated annually for the purpose of taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.

What we found: the Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives, but there are opportunities to build on how it involves citizens and how it intends to work with partners

Findings

- 14 The Council has used a range of data sources to develop its understanding of current need, including a review of the wellbeing objectives of other public sector bodies across Wales, a self-assessment exercise and reviews of its performance information. This will help focus activity on the broader impacts of its well-being objectives to improve social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being.
- 15 The Plan does not state how it intends to work with partners to deliver its wellbeing objectives. There is little reference in the Plan to collaborative activity with its partners and stakeholders to give an indication of the scale of how it works more broadly across public sector boundaries. For example, there is no mention of the Council's involvement in regional working across the three councils within what is now the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Services Board (PSB). As a member of this regional PSB the Council plays a key role in supporting delivery of its Wellbeing Plan 2023-28. This summarises collaborative work within communities and neighbourhoods which supports delivery of the Council's wellbeing objectives.
- 16 The Council used a range of mechanisms to engage with its citizens to help shape its wellbeing objectives including the Youth Council and Town and Community Council Forum. These included an online budget consultation receiving 1,441 responses, citizens panel, staff surveys and engagement with trade unions. This follows the commitment in the Plan to work more closely with local people and communities. While it is positive that the Council consulted on the budget and wellbeing objectives at the same time, there is scope for the Council to involve local communities in shaping the well-being objectives at an earlier stage.
- 17 The Corporate Plan was accompanied by an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA). This broke down the consultation responses by protected characteristic but didn't analyse the data to identify these differences by wellbeing objective to provide more specific information on potential impacts for each wellbeing objective.
- 18 Further, the EIA 'recommended that comprehensive and detailed equality analysis should be carried out to ensure that opportunities to enhance equality are utilised, and any possible negative impacts or barriers for particular groups are taken account of, and if possible mitigated'. We found that this analysis in particular seeking greater insight into the needs of its different communities and reaching the full diversity of the population has not happened. This means that when selecting

the wellbeing objectives, the Council didn't have a full understanding of the impacts each wellbeing objective will have on the full diversity of its population.

- 19 The Council has designed its objectives to focus on delivering long-term improvement and has made explicit links between the objectives and the Wellbeing National Goals. The shorter-term detail is broken down into an annual delivery plan enabling the Council to plan how its objectives will be implemented and to report on progress in meeting them in the short term.
- 20 The Council's Directorate Business Plans also support the delivery of its Corporate Plan and well-being objectives. Each plan identifies a set of aims, aligned to well-being objectives. Each aim has a set of performance measures or commitments which include targets and responsible officer. The Directorate Business Plans also include performance indicators and projects aligned to the Council's ways of working and annual Delivery Plan. However, there are no key performance measures in the Corporate Plan to help citizens understand how the Council will measure progress.
- 21 The Corporate Plan and medium-term financial plan 2024-2028 (MTFP) are aligned. They are discussed and agreed together by Cabinet on an annual basis and the Council's Wellbeing Objectives feature as a key element of its MTFP. There is further evidence of the Council resourcing delivery of its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle. For example, it has worked to understand how it can resource one of its most significant budget pressures in the 'Bridgend Think Family Improve Outcomes 3-year plan – sustainability within Children's Social Care' plan. If achieved the key aims will have medium term preventative benefits, but these have not yet been fully costed.
- 22 The Council has robust arrangements to monitor progress in meeting its wellbeing objectives. It monitors its performance quarterly through its Corporate Performance Assessment (CPA) meetings, which are attended by Cabinet Members, Corporate Management Board, Heads of Service, Chairs of Scrutiny Committees, and Group Leaders. The Council also presents progress in the form of performance monitoring dashboards to its Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee three times a year. The presentations offer a mix of performance indicators and commitments aligned to wellbeing objectives supported by quantitative and some qualitative measures which are intended to improve outcomes for citizens.
- 23 The Council has demonstrated self-awareness and a commitment to learning. For example, learning from others, it has recently developed an annual delivery plan for its wellbeing objectives, developed a new performance management framework and strengthened links between its Corporate and Directorate Plans. However, there is no formal process for prompting and then capturing outcomes from lessons learned exercises. For example, lessons from previous engagement exercises or perhaps to reflect on how well it has applied the sustainable development principle on the wider wellbeing objective setting process.

Recommendations

Recommendations –

- R1** The Council should ensure that it covers the full range of statutory requirements when developing its next well-being statement, including:
- how it considers it has set well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle; and
 - how it proposes to ensure resources are allocated annually for the purpose of taking steps to meet its well-being objectives.
-

- R2** The Council should build on its current approach to engagement by considering ways to:
- draw on citizens' views to inform the development of the Well-being objectives at an early stage; and
 - ensure that it is involving the full diversity of the population.
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- R3** The Council should clearly set out in the corporate plan how it intends to work with partners to support the delivery of its well-being objectives.

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

- The Council 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 Council 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 Council 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 Council involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council 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 Council 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 Council designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council 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 Council considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?</p>	

<p>Has the Council 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 Council has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives. The Council has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.
<p>Has the Council considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council is drawing on its knowledge of partners objectives/ activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.
<p>Monitor and review: 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?</p>	
<p>Has the Council developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 Council to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.

Is the Council seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?

- The Council 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 Council 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 Council 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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