

Report to: Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 13 June 2019

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Finance, Performance and Assets/Head of Business Improvement & Modernisation

Report Author: Planning and Performance Officer

Title: The Effectiveness of Well-being Impact Assessments

1. What is the report about?

This report is an update on the implementation and effectiveness of our approach to impact assessing our decisions, using our web-based Well-being Impact Assessment.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To provide information on the effectiveness of well-being impact assessments. Our approach has been reviewed once but has not been formally scrutinised.

3. What are the recommendations?

That the Committee discusses this report and considers ways Members can support effective challenge and scrutiny of impact assessments.

4. Report details

Background

What is Denbighshire's Well-being Impact Assessment website?

- 4.1 Our Well-being Impact Assessment website is a solution we designed with our staff to help us improve the sustainability of our approach to delivering change, and to maximise opportunities for projects to achieve a positive impact.
- 4.2 We developed the Well-being Impact Assessment website in 2015. It was developed by Officers and Members in Denbighshire County Council, together with support from Public Health Wales. We created a bespoke solution that links to research and evidence (including our Public Service Board's local well-being assessment), and is engaging and interactive. It is wholly unique, and we believe it is the first ever public sector web-based impact assessment of its kind. It acts like an impact screening tool and supports people through the process.
- 4.3 The approach consists of a series of challenging and thought provoking questions to ask people to reflect on their approach and find ways to embed the sustainable development principle. It asks users to consider what the impact is likely to be across a range of themes and issues (including the Future

Generations Act, Equality Act, Environment and Planning Acts, Social Services and Well-being Act, Welsh Language Standards and so on).

- 4.4 The website generates a report in a user friendly format (see Appendix 1). The website has a high degree of self-configuration. This means you could amend aspects of the approach to suit your local needs. The website is also bilingual.

Why did we create a new approach?

- 4.5 The impetus for a new approach to impact assessment was two-fold. First, the Council – in response to legislation – had developed several different approaches to impact assessment. The most notable being the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). These were completed of varying quality and were generally not valued or thoroughly interrogated. Only rarely would the findings of the EIA lead to a changed approach. Second, the introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (hereafter ‘the Act’), gave us a statutory duty to consider the long term impact of our decisions on the well-being of future generations.

What difference has it made?

- 4.6 **Better proposals:** By testing our thinking early on we can design out negative impacts or find ways to mitigate them. We have taken this approach with many projects, including the gypsy and traveller accommodation project, all corporate plan projects, and service level projects such as school transport.
- 4.7 **Decision making:** Members have better quality and more balanced information on which to debate and judge proposals before making decisions.
- 4.8 **Accountability:** Residents have transparent and detailed information to challenge us on our decisions. And they have, for example, the WIA produced regarding the proposal for the Llangollen community garden.
- 4.9 **Collaboration and integration:** We can test our thinking across a range of issues and we can work with partners and stakeholders to assess the impact of our proposals; the website is great for enabling facilitation. The website now facilitates a collaborative approach whereby more than one individual has edit access. We’ve undertaken collaborative impact assessments for regional social work initiatives, the integrated health and social care service (corporate plan project) and more are in the pipeline.

Management Information

- 4.6 Officers have embraced the new approach. In excess of 500 impact assessments have been undertaken since September 2016. This is only partly due to the requirement to undertake impact assessments now as per our project management methodology. Many Officers use the website when they do not formally have to; to test their thinking or to find ways to maximise opportunities to improve their proposals. This is exactly what we wanted to see.
- 4.7 The development of the website did not originally include the creation of a ‘monitoring’ function (i.e. functionality to tell us which areas tend to be more positively or negatively affected, sustainable development scores and so on)

but we did develop a dashboard using PowerBI – an online programme being used more widely by the Council for analysing performance.

- 4.8 However, the use of PowerBI has been problematic. The programme is regularly updated by its own developers and this has led to our own dashboard being unreliable. In short, we cannot trust it. We will explore options to resolve these issues.

Quality

- 4.9 We have embraced the new approach and have seen real culture change. However, there is plenty more room for improvement. We have reviewed the website with our partners once and produced a second release.
- 4.10 Since the launch, we have noticed the natural human tendency towards optimism bias, i.e. viewing things more favourably and over-estimating positive impact or under-estimating negative impact. We have done a lot of work on this to support Officers to reduce the likelihood of optimism bias. For instance, we attended Denbighshire's Leadership Conference and a little while ago we prepared a lightning talk about optimism bias in assessing impacts, [available on YouTube](#), for Public Health Wales' annual conference and the approach has been cited as [good practice by the Wales Audit Office](#).
- 4.11 Aspects of the WIA that have worked extremely well include the new requirement for everyone to consider the impact of the proposal on community cohesion. Equality remains a challenging area to impact assess, which is surprising given that equality impact assessments have been a duty and a feature of decision making processes for many years.
- 4.12 Very soon after launching the WIA website, we established our own Critical Friends Group. The group peer reviews impact assessments to drive up quality and confidence and a report with recommendations is produced and shared with, usually, the project manager (an example of our most recent report can be found at appendix 2). We have undertaken reviews of WIAs for many proposals, including:
- School transport policy
 - Asset Management Strategy
 - Rhyl Waterfront phase 1b
 - North Wales Population Assessment Regional Plan
 - Leisure alternative delivery model
 - Gypsy and traveller accommodation project
 - Denbigh Extra-Care Housing project
 - Waste management project
- 4.13 The quality of WIAs still varies. Sometimes, and occasionally out of necessity, WIAs are undertaken by one person at the last moment. The quality of scrutiny of WIAs by Boards and council committees varies. We have a statutory duty to understand the impact of our decisions on future generations. We need Members' support to ensure effective challenge takes place.

Future

- 4.14 We have demonstrated our approach to the Future Generations Commissioner's office twice and had positive and challenging feedback. We have also given a demonstration to partners from across the region, and some national bodies are also interested in finding out more about our approach.
- 4.15 We are considering making a version of our website available for others to buy and use in their own organisations.
- 4.16 Formalising the role of the Critical Friends Group is a priority for the Strategic Planning Team over the coming year. We intend to undertake a post implementation review on proposals that have been implemented, to see whether our WIA was accurate. We may also request support from our local Public Health Wales team as and when their involvement would be beneficial.
- 4.17 The Public Health Wales Act has made healthy impact assessments mandatory in certain circumstances. Regulations and guidance have not yet been published and we are monitoring this to ensure any additional/new requirements can be managed.

5 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The WIA complements our Corporate Plan priorities.

6 What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

This is a discussion paper and there are no associated costs.

7 What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

WIA not required.

8 What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

This is the first formal review by Scrutiny.

9 Chief Finance Officer Statement

This is a discussion paper and there are no associated costs.

10 What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

No risks are associated with this report.

11 Power to make the Decision

11.1 Local Government Act 2000.

11.2 Section 7.2.1 of the Council's Constitution stipulates that Scrutiny should review or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the

discharge of any of the Council's functions whether by Cabinet or another part of the Council.

Contact Officer:

Planning and Performance Officer: Strategic Planning Team

Tel: 01824 708075