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Integrated Care Fund – North Wales Regional Partnership Board

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This document has been prepared for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, Denbighshire County Council, Conwy County Borough Council, Flintshire County Council, Gwynedd Council, Isle of Anglesey Council and Wrexham County Borough Council as part of work performed in accordance with statutory functions.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Anne Beegan, Fflur Jones and Matthew Brushett under the direction of Matthew Mortlock.

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Introduction

- 1 The Integrated Care Fund (the fund) is allocated by the Welsh Government across Wales. The aim of the fund is to drive and enable integrated working between social services, health, housing and the third sector and independent providers to develop sustainable services.
- 2 Since establishing the fund for 2014-15, the Welsh Government has distributed £270 million across Wales between 2014-15 and 2018-19. In 2019-20, the fund is £115 million.
- 3 Initially focused on supporting older people, and particularly the frail elderly, the scope of the fund has extended over time to include other population groups and projects as set out in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1: the scope of the Integrated Care Fund



Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office

- 4 The Welsh Government distributes the fund across Wales to the seven Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs). The RPBs are responsible for overseeing and managing the use of the fund in their area.
- 5 On behalf of the Auditor General for Wales, we have examined whether the fund is being used effectively to deliver sustainable services that achieve better outcomes for service users. We have focused on whether the Welsh Government is effectively managing the fund to deliver against its intentions, and whether RPBs are demonstrating effective use of the fund. We also considered whether the projects supported by the fund are making a clear difference at a local level.

6 In July 2019, we published our national report **Integrated Care Fund**. We concluded that **the fund has had a positive impact, supporting improved partnership working and better integrated health and social care services. However, aspects of the way the fund has been managed at national, regional and project levels have limited its potential to date. There is little evidence of successful projects yet being mainstreamed and funded as part of public bodies' core service delivery.**



7 This supplementary report, which should be read in conjunction with the national report, sets out more detail about our findings for North Wales Regional Partnership Board. It builds on feedback that we provided to the RPB following completion of our fieldwork.

8 The RPB brings together the six local authorities in North Wales (Conwy County Borough Council, Denbighshire County Council, Flintshire County Council, Gwynedd Council, Isle of Anglesey Council and Wrexham County Borough Council), Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, and representatives of the third sector and independent providers.



Part 1 summarises partnership working in relation to the fund



Part 2 summarises how the fund is used in the region



Part 3 summarises the regional governance arrangements for the fund

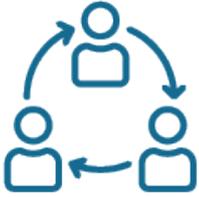


Part 4 summarises the overall impact of the fund in improving outcomes for service users

9 In undertaking this work, we have identified a number of areas that we think the North Wales RPB could improve upon at a regional level. These are set out throughout this report. We have not made specific recommendations for the RPB; however, the national report contains a number of recommendations which apply to all RPBs.

10 We have also identified examples of practice from across Wales which the North Wales RPB can learn from.

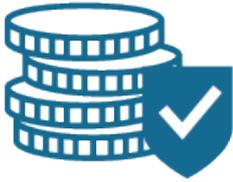
11 Finally, we have also identified some key questions that Board members of Health Boards and scrutiny members of local authorities could explore with lead officers responsible for the fund to maintain a close handle on how the fund continues to be used across the region.



Detailed report

Partnership working

- 12 Our national report has identified that **the fund has helped to bring organisations together to plan and provide services**. Health and social care partnerships have been around for some time but integrated working prior to the fund was limited. We found that the fund has provided the impetus for regional partners to develop integrated services and to move to joint funding arrangements in the context of wider policy and legislation.
- 13 In North Wales, members recognised that the RPB has been on an improvement journey since being established in 2016. Partners have been open to using core and other funding such as winter pressure monies to support Integrated Care Fund projects. But, while there is generally good partnership working in North Wales, many partners recognised that partnership working needs to embed further, with many stating they were unsure if the partnership working would continue were the fund to cease.
- 14 As part of our survey of RPB members, we asked:
 - whether the RPB facilitates good partnership working; and
 - whether the partner organisations demonstrate a commitment to partnership working.
- 15 The responses we received from North Wales were slightly less positive than the all-Wales average but were still generally positive.
- 16 As part of our surveys of RPB members and project leads, we also asked about the impact of the fund on partnership working. The responses we received from North Wales generally confirmed positive views about the impact that the fund has had on strengthening partnership working. The full regional responses to the surveys can be found in [Appendix 1](#), along with the response rates.



Detailed report

Use of the fund

17 Our national report identified that aspects of the way funding has been allocated by the Welsh Government and used by regional partners have limited the potential of the fund to date. The report highlighted that Regional Partnership Boards can find it difficult to balance local population needs with the Welsh Government's indicative allocations for target groups. It also highlights that RPBs use the fund in different ways, not all of which support a regional focus. We found that the approaches to the use of the fund vary between the regions, with limited sharing and learning of the approaches used across Wales.

Exhibit 2: approaches applied to the fund 2014-18

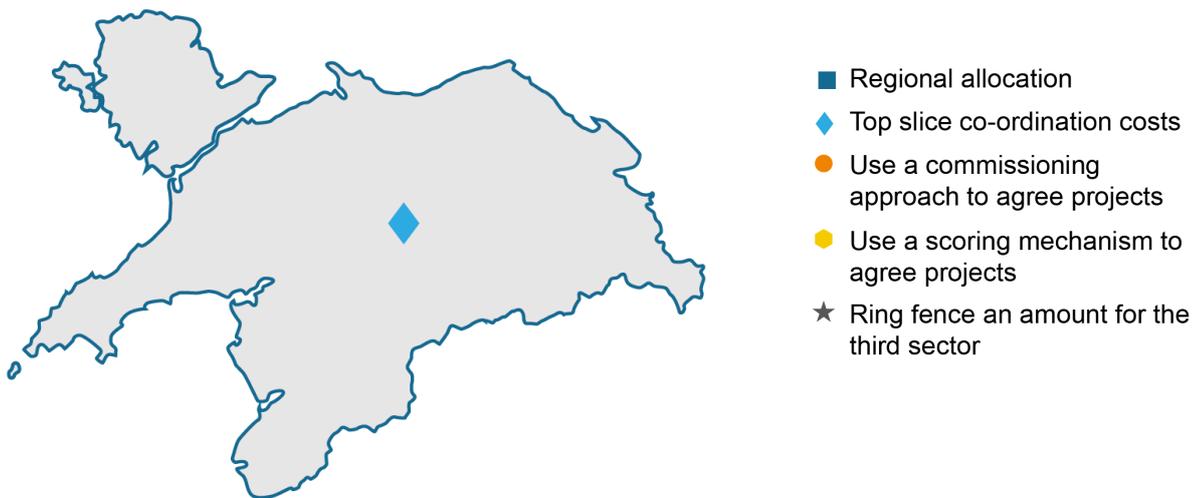


Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office

18 North Wales RPB members acknowledged that there has been limited use of the fund on a regional basis. Since the introduction of the fund, the North Wales RPB has distributed its allocation further to a county level. Many RPB members stated

they feel more comfortable working on a sub-regional basis¹ of one or two local authority areas, rather than across North Wales.

- 19 In North Wales, the fund is top-sliced to fund co-ordination and project management roles. Previously, the North Wales RPB also ring-fenced a proportion of the fund specifically for the third sector, but this came to an end as the number of target groups of the fund expanded. Third sector representatives told us they felt they have insufficient access to the fund and that they benefit predominantly when spending on other projects slip.
- 20 Some RPBs recently began allocating the fund by commissioning thematic groups to identify a programme of work that the fund can support, rather than openly seeking bids from member organisations. The North Wales RPB seeks and approves bids through its sub-group structures. However, while we noted good practice in terms of a developed due diligence check-list, none of the discussion for approving bids that we observed used a scoring mechanism to ensure fair allocation. Projects put forward did broadly align with partners' corporate objectives on prevention and integration although we found no requirement that projects needed to link to the strategic objectives of the RPB and local wellbeing objectives to support implementation of the **Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**.
- 21 Our work also highlights that the RPBs have developed varying approaches for managing underspends. In North Wales, the RPB sub-groups also have varying approaches to managing underspends. Initially, sub-groups anticipate slippage and give larger allocations to projects than their allocated budget. In-year, some sub-groups allocate underspends according to a reserve list of approved projects, other sub-groups automatically divert underspends to high-priority and high-demand projects such as set-up, step-down beds. Finally, the North Wales RPB also invites short notice bids from the third sector for projects which can be delivered in a short timescale.

Areas for improvement



- Look for ways to ensure fair access to the Integrated Care Fund for the third sector
 - Ensure appropriate use of the due diligence check-list for approving Integrated Care Fund projects
 - Ensure underspends are allocated efficiently and effectively in-year
-

¹ Sub-regional working for the fund was observed as three geographical areas: Gwynedd and Anglesey; Conwy and Denbighshire; and Flintshire and Wrexham.



Detailed report

Governance arrangements

- 22 Our national report has identified that governance arrangements for the fund need to be further developed to strengthen central oversight and ensure greater consistency across the regions. The report highlights that RPBs frequently delegate responsibility for the fund to a sub-group and there is limited scrutiny of the use of the fund by health boards and local authorities. The report also identifies that the rigour of project management varies between RPBs and organisations, and few projects involve service users at the outset.
- 23 In the North Wales RPB, various groups at a sub-regional level feed into Integrated Service Boards or to thematic groups, which report to a Leadership Group and then to the RPB. The fund is also discussed at an Integrated Care Fund Leads meeting, which brings together financial and operational leads for the fund from the RPB sub-groups to share and discuss information. There is also a WCCIS² Board and an Autism Service Strategic Group which discusses those aspects of the fund.
- 24 All the RPBs have representation from the statutory bodies, although representation from housing prior to the 2018 amendment to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 was variable. Due to the number of local authorities in the region, the size of the North Wales RPB membership can create challenges in decision-making, discussions and gaining consensus. Uniquely North Wales has co-opted additional members to its RPB with representatives from fire, police and the ambulance service. While this is positive in advancing partnership working, it is possible that it could sometimes create further difficulties in decision-making. Carer and service user representatives identify that their contributions to decisions can often be limited because discussions and decisions are often taking place outside of the RPB meetings and without their involvement.
- 25 The North Wales RPB members do not consistently communicate discussions back to their own organisations, for example, on the allocation and impact that the fund is having within the region.
- 26 The North Wales RPB has taken some steps to link its work with local Public Service Boards (PSBs), for example, through some common memberships in both the RPB and one of the four local PSBs. In addition, the format of the impact assessment for the North Wales RPB Area Plan encouraged the RPB to consider the Well-being of Future Generations (2015) Act and to link in with the area's Public Service Boards, where possible. We found scope to further clarify and improve links between the RPB and the four North Wales PSBs on a regular and ongoing basis, such as by identifying how the PSBs link to the North Wales RPB structure.
- 27 In recognition of the need to avoid gaps or duplication between the RPB and PSBs, and in light of recommendations within **A Healthier Wales: Our Plan for Health**

² Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS)

and Social Care³, the RPB was exploring further opportunities to link with partner PSBs at the time of our review.

28 At a project level, we found both strengths and weaknesses in the management of funded projects (**Exhibit 3**).

Exhibit 3: Strengths and weaknesses in management of projects

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A requirement for project leads to work and report against agreed goals targets ✓ Project leads want to engage service users when planning projects ✓ Locally there appear to be generally good oversight arrangements for funded projects, based on adopting arrangements from the host organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Not all projects are supported by a project plan, particularly for projects rolled-forward from previous years and projects in receipt of underspend ✗ Project management methods vary ✗ No risk management framework in place for the programme and lack of consistent and ongoing risk management of local projects ✗ Delays in communication from area leads to project leads about application and approvals processes

Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office fieldwork

29 In common with many other regions, North Wales RPB is consistently unable to collate, scrutinise and sign-off project monitoring information by the tight deadline required by the Welsh Government. Sign-off often takes place before the RPB has been able to scrutinise monitoring returns.

Areas for improvement	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building on the work to date, make more effective links with all four Public Service Boards
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve timeliness of communication between area leads and project leads
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek assurance that risks relating to funded projects are identified and managed effectively at a local and programme level
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop mechanisms for reporting back to individual organisations in a more consistent way

³ **A Healthier Wales**, published in June 2018, is the Welsh Government's long-term plan for health and social services in Wales.



Detailed report

Outcomes for service users

- 30 Our national report has identified that despite positive examples, the overall impact of the fund in improving outcomes for service users remains unclear, with little evidence of successful projects yet being mainstreamed. The report highlights that RPBs identify a range of positive case studies, but there is little evidence that successful projects have yet been mainstreamed and funded as part of public bodies' core service delivery.
- 31 North Wales RPB members felt strongly that the fund is used to fund the right projects, and that the focus is on outcomes when overseeing the use of the fund. The North Wales regional partners are getting better at capturing performance data for the projects, but acknowledge that capturing consistent and comparable outcomes, rather than output data remains a challenge.
- 32 Similar to other RPB areas, North Wales RPB members continue to struggle to successfully share information which makes demonstrating impact and outcomes from a multi-agency view very difficult. Project leads are increasingly attempting to demonstrate the impact of projects through case studies, including through the use of video stories.
- 33 In common with other RPBs, in North Wales there are few examples of projects being mainstreamed due to financial and savings pressures. Project leads find it particularly difficult to quantify financial savings due to the preventative nature of projects. Such projects aim to manage demand and improve services and it is difficult to quantify these outcomes as a financial saving. A number of projects do not have a clear exit strategy should the funding cease. Routine evaluation of projects is not in place although some evaluation does take place at a local level on an ad hoc basis. Many projects are continuously rolled forward from previous years, limiting opportunities to use the fund to develop new and innovative projects. While still reliant on the fund, a number of the projects are now considered as part of core services.

Exhibit 4: challenges identified with mainstreaming projects through our project lead survey in North Wales



Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office survey of project leads

34 While shared learning is easier with fewer partners, the North Wales RPB has developed a mechanism through the Integrated Care Fund Leads Group to share learning within the region. The forum brings together representatives from the sub-groups in the North Wales sub-regions to discuss areas of commonality. However, despite this group, we observed that project leads operating at a local level are unaware of similar projects in other areas of North Wales. The North Wales RPB has not engaged in shared learning between itself and neighbouring RPBs which creates a risk of missed opportunities in developing and delivering projects that maximise the use of the fund. The North Wales RPB acknowledged it could do more in terms of sharing learning and good practice, including sharing learning from similar projects run in the different areas across the RPB.

Areas for improvement



- Develop exit strategies for all Integrated Care Fund projects
- Explore opportunities to learn from good practice in other regions

Appendix 1

Key findings from our surveys of RPB members and project leads

Our survey of North Wales RPB members⁴⁵ identified that

		Across Wales...
	5 out of 7 agreed that partner organisations demonstrate a commitment to partnership working	84%
	3 out of 7 agreed that there were appropriate links with other regional groups and forums, such as Public Service Boards, to ensure that there were no overlaps or gaps in responding to legislative requirements	56%
	3 out of 6 agreed that the ring fencing of the fund for the national initiatives was helpful	53%
	3 out of 5 agreed that the templates provided by the Welsh Government for quarterly reporting capture the right information	34%
	3 out of 6 agreed that there was helpful ongoing communication between the RPBs and the Welsh Government to understand any changes to the fund	63%
	5 out of 7 agreed that proposals put forward for the RPB to approve are generally good quality	80%
	5 out of 7 agreed that the RPB sets enough time aside for effective scrutiny of the delivery of the projects supported by the fund	57%
	2 out of 7 agreed that there is a clear process for monitoring and managing project underspends and overspends within the RPB structure	72%
	4 out of 7 agreed that the RPB and its sub-group focusses on outcomes when scrutinising the projects	69%
	4 out of 7 agreed that the fund is funding the right projects	64%
	5 out of 7 agreed that the projects funded were making a difference to service users	87%

⁴ Only seven of the 26 (27%) RPB members invited to take part in our RPB member survey responded.

⁵ Not all members responding answered every question.

Our survey of project leads⁶ across North Wales identified that

		Across Wales...
	12 out of 14 (86%) identified that their project(s) had received funding in previous years	71%
	4 out of 15 (27%) identified that their project(s) received additional funding as well as the Integrated Care Fund	48%
	13 out of 15 (87%) identified that their project(s) clearly linked to national strategic priorities, including the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act	92%
	11 out of 15 (73%) identified that there was a risk management framework for their project(s)	58%
	15 out of 15 (100%) identified that they had received appropriate guidance from managers to support them in delivering the project(s)	89%
	8 out of 15 (53%) identified that they were required to include an exit strategy as part of their project plans	40%
	8 out of 15 (53%) identified that there was a single point of accountability for delivery of the project(s)	78%
	5 out of 15 (33%) identified that their project(s) started on time	32%
	6 out of 15 (40%) identified that there was a mechanism to measure the financial benefits of the project(s)	40%
	7 out of 15 (47%) identified that they had been able to demonstrate the impact of the project(s)	60%
	10 out of 15 (67%) identified that the fund is helping to provide sustainable and improved services in their region	66%
	5 out of 13 (38%) identified that there were challenges in mainstreaming the project(s)	75%
	13 out of 15 (87%) identified that the project(s) was making a difference to service users	91%

⁶ Only 15 of the 71 (21%) project leads invited to take part in our project lead survey responded.

Appendix 2

Examples of notable practice

In undertaking our work, we have identified a number of areas of practice which other RPB areas could learn from.

Across the **Cwm Taf Morgannwg** regional footprint, development work has been undertaken between the Regional Partnership Board and the Cwm Taf Public Service Board to identify areas of crossover between the partnerships, and to agree the responsibility of each. To strengthen these arrangements, a representative from the RPB sits on the PSB as a non-voting member and vice versa, ensuring communication between the partnerships.

The **West Wales** Regional Partnership Board has developed a strategic approach to using underspend. When allocating money to new projects at the beginning of the financial year, the unsuccessful projects are ranked using the same scoring mechanism as the successful projects. The highest scoring projects are identified and agreed as to be delivered via any underspend that occurs. This approach means that the regional partnership board is not trying to use up underspend at the end of the year on short term interventions.

Following an internal review, the **Cardiff and Vale** Regional Partnership Board has developed a performance dashboard to monitor the Integrated Care Fund. The dashboard supports quarterly reporting of planned and actual levels of activity, impact and outcomes being achieved by the fund using a RAG rated system to visually identify projects that are off track.

In the **Greater Gwent** Regional Partnership Board, roles and responsibilities of the RPB and its subgroups are set out in a memorandum of understanding. Signed by all partners, the document sets out their shared intention to work together in a spirit of co-operation for the benefit of residents living in Gwent. The memorandum includes a conflict resolution process which has supported open and honest discussions between partners should conflict arise.

These examples are not exhaustive. Further examples can be found in the materials produced following our recent Good Practice Exchange webinars '**Key Issues for Regional Partnership Boards**' which are available to view on our website [audit.wales](https://www.audit.wales)

Appendix 3

Key questions for Board and scrutiny members

To enable Board members of Health Boards and scrutiny members of local authorities to maintain a close handle on how the fund is used across the region, we have identified some examples of questions that could be used with lead officers responsible for the fund and lead officers who are members on the RPB.

Partnership working

- Is the organisation challenging existing working practices and actively seeking new opportunities through the fund to work in partnership with its regional partners?
- Is the organisation considering options to utilise funding more effectively, for example by combining various funding streams, where appropriate, to support services to achieve greater impact?

Use of the fund

- Is the organisation through its representatives on the RPB effectively engaging with relevant stakeholders, including the public, to inform its plans for the use of the fund?
- Is the organisation through its representatives on the RPB ensuring third sector organisations are equal partners and have fair access to the Integrated Care Fund at the beginning of the financial year and in-year?
- Is the organisation through its representatives on the RPB ensuring the approach to assessing, prioritising and approving services in receipt of the Integrated Care Fund is robust?
- Is the organisation through its representative on the RPB ensuring that the fund is used in a way that maximises value for money (for example, by reducing administrative costs)?
- Is there an effective approach to managing fund underspends in-year?

Governance arrangements

- Is there a mechanism in place to ensure the organisation is regularly kept up-to-date about the work of the RPB and its sub-groups in relation to the fund?
- Is there a robust risk management framework in place for the services funded through the Integrated Care Fund, and who would be responsible for any unforeseen issues with projects?
- How does the organisation and the RPB get assurance that the approved Integrated Care Fund projects are managed effectively and that the reporting of approved projects is accurate?

Outcomes for service users

- Is the organisation working with its RPB partners to evaluate what difference funded initiatives have made in terms of outcomes for the regional population?
- Is the organisation working in partnership with its RPB partners to demonstrate outcomes from a multi-agency view?
- Are there services continually funded through the Integrated Care Fund which would significantly impact on the organisation if they were to cease ie those now considered core services?
- Is the organisation mainstreaming Integrated Care Fund projects that have demonstrated a positive impact?
- Is the organisation supporting the RPB to facilitate shared learning within the region to enable continuous improvement of project development and management, and the roll-out of successful localised projects?
- Is the organisation supporting the RPB to engage with other regions to share information and learn lessons from other examples and experiences of the Integrated Care Fund?

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