

Setting of Well-being Objectives – Denbighshire County Council

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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 goals¹. 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 objectives². We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025³.
- 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 prevention⁴.
- 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.

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

Carrying out our examination at Denbighshire County Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
- explain how Denbighshire applied the sustainable development principle throughout in the process of setting its well-being objectives;
 - provide assurance on the extent that Denbighshire applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
 - identify opportunities for Denbighshire 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 Denbighshire 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 Denbighshire put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
 - Has Denbighshire considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
 - Has Denbighshire 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 Denbighshire, 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 a small number of interviews in addition to the above.

How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 10 Denbighshire commenced work on setting new well-being objectives during 2022 and published its new objectives, which it calls themes, in October 2022. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.
- 11 Denbighshire published its well-being objectives as part of its Corporate Plan 2022-2027, which included its well-being statement that is required under the Act. The [Corporate Plan](#) and well-being objectives can be viewed on Denbighshire’s website.
- 12 Under the Act, public bodies must have a well-being statement. This does not have to be a separate document and can be included within a public body’s Corporate Plan (or equivalent). Denbighshire’s Corporate Plan 2022-2027 acts as the Council’s well-being statement.

- 13 Its well-being objectives were set following a process of evidence review, engagement with residents and service users, and consultation with external partners.
- 14 The Council also applied lessons learned from its previous Corporate Plan and well-being objectives to inform the process of setting its current objectives.

Exhibit 1: Denbighshire's well-being objectives 2022-2027

1. A Denbighshire of quality housing that meets people's needs
2. A prosperous Denbighshire
3. A healthier and happier, caring Denbighshire
4. A learning and growing Denbighshire
5. A better connected Denbighshire
6. A greener Denbighshire
7. A fairer, safe and more equal Denbighshire
8. A Denbighshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language
9. A well-run, high performing council

What we found: the Council has applied the Sustainable Development principle throughout the process of setting of its well-being objectives and has clear arrangements in place to support their delivery. Expanding its engagement activity to involve a greater diversity of residents could further strengthen this

The process for setting well-being objectives

Evidence base

- 15 The Council used a wide range of evidence to inform the setting of its well-being objectives, the main source being the PSB wellbeing assessment. This was produced in 2022 and contains data from a wide range of regional and national partners and sources, and includes data looking at future trends.
- 16 The wellbeing assessment also includes an analysis of current and future trends and a review of the root causes of problems, as well as understanding the current and future trends.
- 17 Additionally, the Council used performance data included in its self-assessment reporting and service business plans.

Consultation and involvement

- 18 The Council used a range of primary and secondary consultation evidence to inform the setting of its well-being objectives.
- 19 It conducted a 'County Conversation', a series of workshops and three online surveys with residents, that informed the setting of its well-being objectives. The surveys were timed to allow residents to inform the evidence base, comment on draft objectives and inform the direction of the objectives after they had been approved by Full Council. In addition to the online surveys, residents were able to access the surveys in Council hubs and premises, such as libraries and community centres.
- 20 The Council received a total of 550 responses over the three stages of the County Conversation but was not able to reach all seldom-heard groups. The Council has already reflected on this and developed plans to change future engagement activity and ensure a wider range of views are received from its engagement activity.

- 21 Additionally, the Council engaged with a range of public and third sector partners, including trade unions, town and community councils, NRW and North Wales Police and Fire and Rescue services.
- 22 The Council also used secondary consultation data to inform the setting of its well-being objectives. Both the PSB Well-being Assessment and the RPB's Population Needs Assessment were informed by public consultation exercises.

Integration

- 23 The Council has considered how its objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact. Objective Boards, which have responsibility for the progress and monitoring of each objective, have Terms of Reference which state how they should consider interdependencies with other objectives and how they can impact on partner organisations. Objectives not supported by a Board are overseen by a Corporate Director and Lead Cabinet Member who meet quarterly to review progress and identify interdependencies.
- 24 The Council's quarterly Corporate Plan update includes evidence of where activity to support the objectives has involved working with external partners. The Council also completed a well-being impact assessment covering all the objectives which outlines their potential contribution to improving social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being and to the national well-being goals.

Delivering the well-being objectives

Arrangements

- 25 The Council has a range of processes in place to support the delivery of its well-being objectives.
- 26 Five objectives are supported by a Board, chaired by a Cabinet Member. Boards meet on a monthly basis to review activity, risk and funding within its objective. Board activity and processes are outlined in a 'Terms of Reference' document which provides guidance to Board Chairs and members. The remaining four objectives are supported by the respective Director and Cabinet Member, who fulfil the role and responsibilities of a Board.
- 27 Each objective is supported by a Strategic Planning and Performance Officer who provides programme support to the Boards.
- 28 The Council uses a project management approach to record activity and information relating to arrangements to deliver its well-being objectives.
- 29 Membership of the Objective Boards is made up of Council officers and Members, a decision which allows the Council to promote accountability for the delivery of the plan. The Council has plans to set up collaboration groups for each objective that will include external professionals and service users within their membership.

- 30 Such an arrangement would assure the Council that it is working in collaboration with external partners.

Resources

- 31 The Council has not fully resourced activity to support its well-being objectives for the entirety of the Corporate Plan but has processes in place to mitigate the impact of any changes to planned activity.
- 32 When the Council approved its Corporate Plan and well-being objectives, it only identified full funding for activity in year one of the plan. The Chief Financial Officer told the full Council on 11 October 2022 that ‘the proposed new Corporate Plan is very ambitious and will need a large amount of financial resources to succeed in full’.
- 33 Some activity beyond year one has funding identified to support it. The remaining planned activity, which is currently uncosted and unfunded, has been scheduled over the full five years of the Corporate Plan to spread the financial burden on the Council.
- 34 The Council is currently reviewing the impact that the current financial climate will have on its ability to fund all planned activity to achieve its objectives. The Council has processes in place to ensure that the impact of any changes to funding and activity is considered. This includes completing a Well-being impact assessment and seeking input from external partners before any changes are approved.
- 35 Recommendations for the prioritisation of activity based on funding pressures are made by Heads of Service to the respective Cabinet Member and then to Cabinet and Full Council, who make the final decision. This process is supported by the impact assessments.

Monitoring the well-being objectives

Monitoring and evaluation

- 36 The Council has measures and monitoring arrangements in place to review and understand progress against its well-being objectives.
- 37 Progress against each objective and project activity is measured using agreed indicators, which include outputs and outcomes. Some measures are a count, looking to show improvement (for instance, the number of people who were on the Complex Disabilities Specialist Housing Needs Register for whom supported housing has been secured), others are benchmarked against national performance and show direction of travel and performance relative to national performance (for instance the percentage of working-age people who are claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance or Universal Credit).

- 38 Additionally, there are also objective ambitions, which are more strategic in their outlook and combine a range of activity often in partnership. An example of this is to make 1,000 more homes available within Denbighshire through providing additional council homes and working with Registered Social Landlords and private developers. This process is managed by the Council's 'Guide to Measuring Performance'.
- 39 Performance data uses the national upper-quartile range as its benchmark and also maps direction of travel. Performance is defined in the Council's guide as 'excellent', 'good', 'acceptable', and 'priority for improvement'. The progress of each project is shown on a scale defined in the Council's guide, which includes 'on target', 'experiencing obstacles', and 'at risk', and is supplemented by exception reporting for projects that are not improving.
- 40 Each objective is also reviewed twice a year by a Tranche review, which provides a more strategic review of progress and identifies what is working and not working, and considers possible new activity. These reviews are completed in a joint meeting of the Senior Leadership Team and Cabinet, which reviews the performance of the Corporate Plan as a whole.
- 41 The Corporate Plan performance review is completed on a quarterly basis. It is tabled twice annually by the Senior Leadership Team, Cabinet and Performance Scrutiny, and once annually with the Governance and Audit Committee and Full Council.
- 42 These arrangements allow the Council to understand progress against its objectives.

Learning lessons

- 43 The previous Corporate Plan and set of well-being objectives were formally reviewed and the findings of this evaluation informed the processes used for setting and monitoring the current objectives.
- 44 The Council has also introduced opportunities to review and identify lessons learned as part of the ongoing monitoring of objectives and project activity. This is written into project management guidance and the Term of Reference for objective Boards and relates to how the SD principle is applied.
- 45 The Council has already reviewed its engagement process for the setting of its well-being objectives and has identified the need to increase its response rate and directly engage with residents with protected characteristics.

Recommendations

Exhibit 2: recommendations

Engagement with residents

- R1 To improve how the Council draws on the views of the full diversity of residents when designing its well-being objectives, the Council should:
- pro-actively target seldom-heard residents and those with protected characteristics; and
 - look to increase the number of residents it engages with.

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?	
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?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– 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.

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 involved others in developing its well-being objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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.
Has the body considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?	<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.
Has the body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?	<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.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

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?

Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?

- 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.

Has the body considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?

- 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.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

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?

<p>Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, eg 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.
<p>Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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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