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Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru  
Auditor General for Wales

# Good governance when determining significant service changes – National Summary



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU





I have prepared this document so as to provide a summary of work undertaken in accordance with the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

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**Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.**

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## Summary report

### Summary

- 1 In responding to reductions in public spending and rising demand for some services, all unitary councils in Wales are continuing to make decisions about the future shape and level of services delivered within their area. Such decisions are often controversial, generate considerable local interest and can have significant impacts on the individuals and groups affected.
- 2 Councils are also required to comply with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and associated Statutory Guidance. The Statutory Guidance states that: ‘Together, the seven well-being goals and five ways of working provided by the Act are designed to support and deliver a public service that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’<sup>1</sup>. The Welsh Government’s Reforming Local Government White Paper also recognises that the governance mechanisms required to underpin regional working will need to ensure that Elected Members remain at the heart of the decision making and scrutiny process.<sup>2</sup>
- 3 It is important, therefore, that councils’ arrangements for making decisions are robust and fit for the future. This includes for example arrangements for scrutinising proposals and options and engaging and involving stakeholders in decision making. As well as ensuring that those in key governance roles understand and apply their roles and responsibilities appropriately, and receive appropriate support to make informed decisions.
- 4 We define service change as any significant change in delivering services and/or any significant change in services experienced by external service users. Service changes could include, for example, the way the service is delivered, the level of service provided, the availability of the service or the cost of the service.
- 5 Changes to back office services, or changes to frontline services such as management restructure or other changes, for example to deliver efficiencies, that are not intended to have an impact on the services experienced by external service users are not included in the definition of ‘service changes’ for the purpose of this review.

1 [Welsh Government, Statutory Guidance on the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015, 2016](#)

2 [Welsh Government, White Paper Reforming Local Government: Resilient and Renewed, 31 January 2017](#)

- 6 During 2016-17 we reviewed arrangements for determining significant service changes at all of the 22 unitary councils in Wales. During spring and summer of 2017, we have been issuing each of the 22 councils with a separate local report. These local reports comment on each council's governance arrangements for determining significant service changes. The reports will be available on our website over the course of 2017 once they have progressed through each council's own formal committee processes.
- 7 This report is designed primarily to provide insight, share existing practice and prompt further conversations and discussions between councils and other organisations. The main focus of the report is to highlight examples of current practice to stimulate the sharing of learning and approaches.
- 8 We are not suggesting the identified examples of practice are necessarily leading practice or that these practices should be applied universally. They are interesting ways in which some councils have approached the governance of service change which we think there may be some merit in other organisations exploring. We want to highlight different practices that may stimulate debate and discussion of possible alternative approaches or elements of them. We have included contact details for each practice example.
- 9 In reviewing arrangements for determining service changes at all of the 22 councils and considering the quality of decision-making arrangements we looked for:
  - clear reasons for why and how councils are making changes to services;
  - clear arrangements that set out who is responsible for making decisions that are well understood by councillors and officers;
  - wide-ranging options appraisals accompanied by sufficient information and effective scrutiny to inform decisions regarding service changes;
  - the engagement and involvement of stakeholders in decision making in relation to service change including service users/citizens and non-executive members;
  - arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the impact of service changes; and
  - arrangements for reviewing the effectiveness of decision-making arrangements on service change.

- 10 We looked at a wide range of significant service changes across all 22 councils in Wales. Some of the types of service change we looked at included:
- increases in the cost of services to users including, for example, hire of sports pitches, collection of bulky waste and pest control;
  - changing the opening hours of facilities – for example civic amenity sites and customer care centres;
  - changing who delivers some services – from the council to trusts or volunteers – for example libraries, leisure centres and community halls; and
  - re-organising how services were delivered by the council including closing some facilities and opening new ones in areas such as social services.
- 11 We concluded that:
- Governance arrangements for determining significant service change are generally clear and well understood.
- 12 We have not included any recommendations in this report, as we have already issued each council with relevant proposals for improvement in their own local report.

# Detailed report

## Councils need to better articulate how they will approach making significant changes to services to meet financial and other challenges in the medium term

### What we looked for

- 13 We looked for evidence that councils have a clear vision and strategy for determining service change proposals, developed in conjunction with stakeholders linked to the overall strategic vision. Alongside this we looked for clear objectives for service changes against which councils can measure progress and subsequent impact. We also looked for evidence that councils had begun to give consideration to how they will ensure that decisions regarding service change take account of the council's well-being objectives and are taken with regard to the sustainable development principle. We do not expect councils to have 'separate' decision-making arrangements specifically in relation to service change, or for councils to necessarily have a separate vision for how they will be changing services.

### What we found

- 14 Generally councils have developed clear visions and priorities which provide an overarching framework within which decisions regarding service change are taken. Some councils have gone further and set out a more focused vision for how the council is likely to change in the medium term in view of financial and other challenges. Some councils have set out criteria that they will use to guide decisions relating to budget reductions and service change. We also found that specific objectives for individual service change proposals are not always explicitly clear or set out at the time when the decision is taken. Councils are beginning to introduce mechanisms to ensure that the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act is taken into account in service change decision making but are at different stages of development, and for all it is still early in the process.



## Some examples of the approaches adopted include:

- **Powys County Council – Commissioning Approach:**

The Council has decided to use a ‘commissioning approach’ which it defines as ‘redesigning services around the current and future needs of communities and individuals, and then deciding how that service is best delivered, and who should provide it.’<sup>3</sup> The Council has applied this approach to its leisure services with the possibility of this being extended to property management and maintenance, highways, transport and recycling. For further information contact: Paul Griffiths, Strategic Director Place, [paul.griffiths@powys.gov.uk](mailto:paul.griffiths@powys.gov.uk).

- **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council – Operating Model Design:**

Recognising the need to develop a different approach to managing budget reductions, the Council has developed an approach that has several work streams underpinned by an Operating Model Design (OMD). The OMD sets out a guiding statement, principles and expectations for how the Council will operate. For further information contact Andrew Mogford, Business Change Manager, [andrew.mogford@merthyr.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.mogford@merthyr.gov.uk).

- **Caerphilly County Borough Council – principles to inform potential service change decisions:**

The Council has agreed a number of principles that it has used to inform its deliberations on potential service changes and savings proposals, including for example making changes to the opening hours of the Council’s Customer Care Centres and its Civic Amenity Sites. The principles are:

- ‘protecting front-line services where we can and reducing expenditure on management and administrative costs;
- increasing fees and charges where appropriate;
- reducing, rather than removing services where possible;
- focusing on priorities; and
- looking at alternative ways of delivering services (collaboration, partnerships, community trusts, etc).<sup>4</sup>

For further information contact Stephen Harris, Interim Head of Corporate Finance, [harrisr@caerphilly.gov.uk](mailto:harrisr@caerphilly.gov.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Powys County Council, Corporate Improvement Plan 2016-2020: 2017 Update, March 2017

<sup>4</sup> Caerphilly County Borough Council, Budget Proposals 2015/16 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2015/2018, Council Meeting – 25 February 2017, page 31

## Exhibit 1: learning points – vision and strategy

### Learning points – vision and strategy

Councils could:

- adopt criteria/principles for service change decision making to:
  - help decision makers maintain focus on agreed priorities;
  - help speed up decision making;
  - manage expectations of stakeholders in advance;
  - improve transparency around the rationale for decisions; and
  - provide a focus for scrutinising individual decisions.
- set out specific and measureable objectives for each service change to help transparency, and also help to focus on why/which options are the most appropriate to follow;
- set objectives as the first stage of putting in place an effective framework for measuring the impact of service changes; and
- consult stakeholders on the 'type' of council they want to see to help provide a legitimacy and framework within which to take potentially increasingly difficult decisions over the medium term.

## Councils should set out clear governance arrangements for determining significant service changes

### What we looked for

- 15 We looked for clarity of roles and responsibilities of those involved in making and taking decisions, and that these roles and responsibilities were well understood by councillors and senior officers. We also expected councils to have clear arrangements in place to ensure that decisions to change services complied with relevant constitutional and legal requirements. We also looked for evidence that councils are developing the appropriate capacity to effectively develop and deliver their planned changes to services. This includes identifying appropriate resources, including money and people, and ensuring that those charged with determining service changes are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to carry out those roles.

### What we found

- 16 We found that arrangements for developing and determining service changes are generally clear and well understood by officers and members, including understanding where accountability and responsibility for decision making lies.
- 17 Some councils have developed specific or additional arrangements for developing and determining service changes, including the establishment of transformation or project boards or similar, typically involving a number of senior members and officers. Other councils deliver service changes under existing governance arrangements.
- 18 Councils take a range of approaches to building capacity to deliver service change. Some engage external capacity to help deliver changes, whilst others rely on existing management structures to support changes, and some establish bespoke corporate teams to provide expertise in areas such as project management and lean systems thinking.
- 19 There is an opportunity to consider developing the capacity of officers in preparing proposals and business cases. Similarly there is scope to enhance the support for councillors to more effectively carry out their roles in the service change process either as executive or scrutiny members in, for example, testing the robustness of business cases and options appraisals or assessing and monitoring the impact of proposals. There are also opportunities to undertake development activities around these topics on a collaborative basis to maximise opportunities for learning from, and engaging with, peers.

Some examples of practices and approaches that councils have introduced include:

- **Monmouthshire County Council – ‘Future Monmouthshire’ programme:**

The Council has developed a ‘Future Monmouthshire’ programme to identify the challenges facing the county, working with staff, communities and others to identify solutions and acting as an enabler to make them happen. The programme aims to help the Council ensure that it is able to identify savings and deliver a balanced budget in the short and medium term while creating the capacity to explore and address some of the complex challenges facing its communities, now and in the future. For further information contact Kellie Beirne or Matthew Gatehouse, [kelliebeirne@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:kelliebeirne@monmouthshire.gov.uk) or [matthewgatehouse@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:matthewgatehouse@monmouthshire.gov.uk).

- **Denbighshire County Council – Corporate framework for alternative service providers:**

The Council recognises the need for clarity about its rationale for delivering services through external organisations. In anticipation of future Alternative Delivery Models, it has developed a comprehensive approach to evaluating future options. The approach sets out a number of ‘critical governance’ questions that the Council’s Corporate Executive Team and elected members should ask when considering alternative delivery models and when approving related business cases. For further information contact Richard Weigh CPFA, Head of Finance/S.151 Officer, [richard.weigh@denbighshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.weigh@denbighshire.gov.uk).

- **Flintshire County council – Programme Board Management:**

Following a period of intensive business planning to realise efficiencies starting in 2013, the Council was aware of the challenges of planning and co-ordinating all the major change programmes. This awareness, plus a Wales Audit Office proposal for improvement around efficiency planning led the Council to embark on a new programme management approach.

The major change programmes within Chief Officer Portfolios are managed and monitored using Programme Boards. These have a consistent structure, purpose, support and reporting arrangements and are designed to provide effective co-ordination of planning, implementation of and accountability for major change programmes which involve multiple projects and work-streams (on which efficiencies depend). The Boards are not decision-making bodies, as they can make recommendations to the appropriate Committee or group. The Boards, established in 2015, work to a common agenda, terms of reference and have programme management planners. Membership of the Boards include relevant officers plus the portfolio holder; with the Leader and Deputy Leader having a standing invite to all Boards.

Following a review of the Board's models, management and effectiveness in April 2017 a revised structure for the Boards was agreed. These complement the council's portfolios apart from a joint Corporate and Customer Board plus an Assets and Capital Board. The purpose of the Boards is to oversee and support the delivery of the portfolio business plans 2017-23. Common agendas include standing items on Business Planning actions, In-year Business Planning Management, In-term Financial Management, plus Portfolio Policy and Strategy as required. For further information contact Karen Armstrong, [karen.armstrong@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:karen.armstrong@flintshire.gov.uk).

- **Vale of Glamorgan Council – shaping scrutiny arrangements around well-being objectives:**

The Council has produced a new Corporate Plan for 2016-2020 and has set out its planned activity to demonstrate how it will contribute to the wellbeing goals for Wales. Linked to this, the Council has restructured its scrutiny arrangements in line with its wellbeing objectives.

The Council re-designated the remits of four Overview and Scrutiny Committees to reflect the Council's four wellbeing outcomes, while maintaining a single Corporate Performance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee. For further information contact Rob Thomas, Managing Director, [drthomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:drthomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk).

- **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council – Project Management arrangements:**

The Council has established a Change Management Programme Board to assist with the delivery of its change programme, with clear terms of reference. The role of this Board is summarised as to ‘govern and direct the MTCBC [Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council] Change Management Programme within the strategic direction set by the Council.’ The Council has a Change Management Steering Group whose role it is to ‘challenge and monitor approved programmes, projects and actions under the direction of the Programme SRO (Senior Responsible Officer)<sup>5</sup>. The Council has also established a Business Change Team that supports service managers in delivering options for service changes. For further information contact Andrew Mogford, Business Change Manager, [andrew.mogford@merthyr.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.mogford@merthyr.gov.uk).

- **Cardiff Council – Organisational Development Programme:**

In May 2014, the Council established an Organisational Development Programme (ODP) in response to a range of critical challenges, including the marked deterioration of the Council’s financial position, demand-led pressures on services, and the inadequate performance of a number of statutory services.

An Organisational Development (OD) Board, dedicated to reviewing the progress of strategic change projects and which comprises the senior management team, meets on a monthly basis. The OD Board is supported by two Programme Boards: Reshaping Services Board and Enabling and Commissioning Board, both of which meet monthly and cover all the service change projects within the ODP. An Investment Review Board (IRB) considers and approves all programmes and projects for which there is a financial implication.

The programme is also supported by a team of officers whose remit is to enable the implementation of service changes by offering advice and support. For further information contact: Dean Thomas, OD Programme Manager, [dean.thomas@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:dean.thomas@cardiff.gov.uk).

5 Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Change Management Programme – Steering Group Terms of Reference. Version Number 1.3, August 2016

- **Ceredigion County Council – Cross Party Transformation and Efficiency Consultative Group:**

The Council has established the Cross Party Transformation and Efficiency Consultative Group as part of its arrangements for delivering transformation and efficiency. The group comprises the Leader of the Council, Deputy Leader of the Council, Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Directors. The Panel also includes politically balanced cross party Representation and Overview and Scrutiny Chairs, or their representatives, in a 'non-voting' capacity. The Group's roles include:

- being a 'critical friend', by questioning future plans for addressing financial constraints faced by the Council;
- assisting with the development of new ideas and options that will assist with the delivery of services in the future; and
- considering the impact of savings on service delivery standards and performance<sup>6</sup>.

For further information contact Russell Hughes-Pickering,  
Head of Performance and Economy,  
[russell.hughes-pickering@ceredigion.gov.uk](mailto:russell.hughes-pickering@ceredigion.gov.uk)

- **Carmarthenshire County Council – TIC Programme:**

The Council's Transformation, Innovation and Change (TIC) programme has been established for a number of years. TIC run specific projects of their own, but in addition services can call on the TIC to support service change in their area. The programme supports the reconfiguration of service processes and the delivery of efficiencies through the removal of unnecessary process steps using 'lean' systems thinking. The TIC programme has supported a wide range of services to achieve change, sometimes culminating in a TIC Award being made to a service when a programme has been particularly successful in achieving positive change. The TIC Team, working jointly with services, is seen by the Council as a key element in the success of the programme. Officers in service areas that have experienced the TIC processes then act as 'ambassadors' and practitioners. These officers then support other services to develop and deliver change, and help embed the culture and develop the skills needed to drive change throughout the organisation. The Council also has a TIC Programme Board to oversee the development and implementation of the process, chaired by the Chief Executive and with Executive Board Member contribution. For further information contact Jon Owen, TIC (Transform, Innovate and Change) Programme Manager, [jowen@carmarthenshire.gov.uk](mailto:jowen@carmarthenshire.gov.uk).

6 Ceredigion County Council, Report to Cross Party Transformation and Efficiency Consultative Group To consider the future operating arrangements and structure of the Council's Transformation programme, 12 September 2016

## Exhibit 2: learning points – governance arrangements

### Potential learning points – governance arrangements

Councils could:

- where they have already established teams with expertise in managing and supporting service change processes, look for opportunities to share capacity;
- review the skills and capacity to deliver significant service change including for example project management and business planning skills. This can help to identify specific gaps in knowledge, skills or expertise required to deliver the Council's objectives for service change and inform future training programmes; and
- collaborate in the development of approaches to strengthening capacity including learning from each other's approaches and experiences, and the delivery of training and other developmental activity.



## Councils should consider a range of options for significant service changes supported by appropriate evidence to inform decisions

### What we looked for

- 20 We looked for evidence that councils consider a range of options before determining service changes, and that sufficient information is provided to decision-makers on each option to inform their decisions. We expect decision-makers to be provided with details of the potential implications of each option in a balanced way. This would include the impact on finances, service performance and standards and the views of stakeholders including service users. For each option we would also expect to see a robust assessment of risk and the implications for service users and the public of each option.
- 21 We also looked for arrangements that are transparent and which provided opportunities for public scrutiny of the proposals and options where appropriate.

### What we found

- 22 Most councils usually provide decision-makers with a range of options when considering service changes. However the quality and range of information provided to decision-makers on alternative options varies across and within councils. Opportunities to scrutinise proposed service changes also differ across councils. In some councils Overview and Scrutiny Committees are engaged at an early stage in commenting on proposals with opportunities to influence their development. The involvement of scrutiny is less systematic in other councils, and may come later in the decision-making process, by which time there may be limited scope to influence the development of proposals or shape decisions. The quality of equality impact assessments of proposed service changes is variable, with some councils identifying the absence of available data as a barrier to improving them.
- 23 There are differences in the range of criteria used to assess options appraisals between councils, and in some cases within councils. Whilst some councils adopt standard criteria against which options for service change are appraised, in others there is a less systematic approach. Whilst using consistent criteria does not guarantee that robustness of options appraisal will improve, it does reduce the risk that key considerations will not be taken into account. This in turn improves the likelihood that the inevitable risks often associated with service change are well-managed.

## Some examples of approaches include:

- **Monmouthshire County Council – WFG Act and decision making:**

A number of councils have introduced consideration of the WFG Act into reports or business case proformas accompanying service change proposals. For example in Monmouthshire County Council reports recommending service changes include a completed WFG assessment proforma through which the Council seeks to ensure that proposals have had regard for the sustainable development principle as set out in the WFG Act. For further information contact Hazel Clatworthy, [hazelclatworthy@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:hazelclatworthy@monmouthshire.gov.uk).

- **Powys County Council – Integrated Impact Assessments Tool:**

The Council uses an integrated impact assessment tool for every service change. The tool includes comprehensive criteria including impact on the Council and Welsh Government's priorities, risks, equalities, Welsh Language, five ways of working in the WFG Act, corporate parenting, community cohesion and workforce, and assessment of achievability.

The Council introduced the use of this tool during 2015-16. For Further information contact: David Powell, Strategic Director Resources, [david.powell@powys.gov.uk](mailto:david.powell@powys.gov.uk).

- **Flintshire County Council – impact assessment of inter-linked change proposals:**

The Council has developed as a form of self-improvement an assessment tool as part of the business planning approach. The tool identifies cumulative impacts of service changes on different client groups. The approach provides an overview of impacts identified by representative groups of people who, for example, share protected characteristics, or experience poverty. The cumulative impact assessment tool helps with reviews of each change proposal's impacts and risks. It will also provide an overview of the cumulative impact on people with protected characteristics and mitigating actions. The approach complements, as a wider impact assessment the Equality Impact Assessments for each relevant service change proposal.

For further information contact Karen Armstrong, [karen.armstrong@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:karen.armstrong@flintshire.gov.uk).

- **Newport City Council – use of data to inform service change:**

The Council has invested in the development of spatial data and ward profiles which it is using to inform its well-being assessments and which it expects will provide it with improved information to inform future decisions on service change. For further information contact Shaun Powell, [digital@newport.gov.uk](mailto:digital@newport.gov.uk).

- **Bridgend County Borough Council – Overview and Scrutiny work programming:**

At the beginning of the year a 12 item forward work programme is set for each Overview and Scrutiny Committee; some but not all of these items are programmed into specific meetings. Each Committee meeting focuses on just two items to ensure in depth consideration of issues. The FWP is then discussed at the beginning of each Committee meeting, where the remaining items of the original 12 are considered, along with a list of ‘non priority’ items. The Committee assesses these items for relevance and then they build them into the Forward Work Programme. This enables Committee agendas to be responsive to emerging issues including pre-scrutiny of service changes or specific aspects of service change, such as the consideration of consultation questions prior to them being issued in support of service change. The committees are flexible in determining meeting dates to ensure key issues are covered as and when needed. For further information contact Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services, [gary.jones@bridgend.gov.uk](mailto:gary.jones@bridgend.gov.uk).

- **Cardiff Council – Evaluation methodology for Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) service changes:**

As part of their Organisational Development Programme (ODP) the Council has developed an evaluation methodology for Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) service changes. This methodology, and supporting scoring matrix, sets out the evaluation criteria and questions to be addressed by officers. Questions relate to risk, income opportunities, maintaining influence in decision making, flexibility to change service delivery in the future, and operational performance. The methodology provides a structured and consistent approach to assessing each ADM whilst ensuring the Council addresses key issues of finance, risk, control, and performance of each option.

The Council used this evaluation methodology to appraise the service change options for the ADMs for leisure centres and infrastructure services. For further information contact Dean Thomas, OD Programme Manager, [dean.thomas@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:dean.thomas@cardiff.gov.uk).

- **Wrexham County Borough Council – Project Management approach to service change:**

Each service change proposal is approached using project management principles. The Council has adopted a Performance Management process, and has developed a Project Management Handbook. Proposals to change services include an assessment of anticipated benefits as well as Equalities Impact Assessment and a Risk Assessment. For further information contact Louise Payne, PIPS Lead (Improvement & Consultation), [louise.payne@wrexham.gov.uk](mailto:louise.payne@wrexham.gov.uk).

### Exhibit 3: learning points – options appraisal

#### Potential learning points – governance arrangements

Councils could:

- consider establishing criteria, or reviewing existing criteria for determining service change proposals, ensuring that they include consideration of:
  - cost implications of alternative options;
  - results of consultation and engagement;
  - detailed risk assessment of available options;
  - anticipated impact on performance;
  - employee implications;
  - links to corporate priorities;
  - impact on current and future service users; and
  - possible mitigation measures.
- consider the criteria used by other councils in options appraisals to identify possible ways of strengthening arrangements.
- ensure that the availability of information on options and proposed changes is available to Overview and Scrutiny Committees to consider with sufficient time for meaningful scrutiny, as well as allowing sufficient time for decision-makers to give meaningful consideration to the findings of Overview and Scrutiny committees.
- report all significant options that have been discounted as part of formal Committee/ Cabinet reports on service change proposals to demonstrate transparency and accountability. Reports could include details of who took the decision to discount options and why.

## Councils should consult stakeholders on significant service changes and the importance of proactively engaging stakeholders in the development of future service change proposals is likely to increase

### What we looked for

- 24 We looked for evidence that councils have developed effective arrangements to engage and inform stakeholders in decision making regarding service change proposals and their potential implications. We looked for evidence that stakeholders are not only engaged with, and consulted, but also that the results of consultation and engagement activity have been properly considered to inform decision making. We also looked for evidence that interested parties such as the public, service users and other stakeholders could easily find information relevant to decisions to change services, and how clear it is to them who is responsible for decision making.

### What we found

- 25 We found many examples where detailed or extensive consultation has been undertaken on service change proposals, either as part of consultation on budget proposals as a whole, or on individual service change proposals including making use of social media and new technology. Some councils recognise the need to widen and improve their consultation in relation to service changes particularly to better reflect the diversity of their local communities, and to engage more effectively with groups who share protected characteristics. In some councils it is also not always clear how the findings of consultation have been taken into account in decision making with, for example, details of consultation findings not being reported in reports alongside service change proposals, despite consultation and engagement having been undertaken.
- 26 We also found a few examples where changes to services have been proposed without consultation or engagement with the public and/or service users.

- 27 Working proactively with stakeholders to explore and 'co-produce' service change proposals is likely to grow in importance. Particularly so as councils fulfil their requirement to have regard for the 'involvement' aspect of the sustainable development principle in meeting the requirements of the WFG Act. We recognise that for many, if not all, councils, the financial imperative to identify savings has necessitated an approach that required savings to be generated quickly from some service changes. However working more closely with service users to co-design solutions based on need can also present an opportunity for councils to develop more efficient, economic and effective ways of meeting needs.
- 28 The availability and ease of accessing information relating to councils' service change decision making varies considerably across the 22 councils in Wales. In some councils for example, forward work programmes for their Cabinets and Overview and Scrutiny committees are either not up to date, difficult to locate on their websites, or only available within each of the committee/cabinet meeting papers. In some councils the work programmes only contain limited details of forthcoming items, with no indication of the purpose and likely key issues to be discussed.
- 29 In other councils work programmes are well publicised, comprehensive and up to date. Minutes and agendas are also easily accessible and accompanied by effective search engines. For these councils, the opportunities for the public to engage and be aware of decisions on service change are much clearer and more transparent.
- 30 There is also a variation in the extent to which stakeholders are encouraged to participate in decision making. In some councils there are clear guides to the decision-making process which explain how the public can become involved as well as, for example, a clear mechanism for the public to suggest items and/or provide evidence to Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The extent of webcasting across councils also varies, with most councils broadcasting Council meetings, some also broadcasting Cabinet meetings and a few extending or planning to extend this to some or all Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings.

Some approaches to engaging the public in service change decision-making include:

- **Caerphilly County Borough Council – Consultation, engagement and pre-decision scrutiny:**

Overview and Scrutiny Committees in Caerphilly have been able to input into some significant service changes proposals from an early stage which has enabled them to have a clear role in refining and developing proposals. Members of the public with access to the Council's website are also able to find out which issues are due to be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committees as work programmes are accessible as standalone documents, regularly updated and easy to find. They also provide a good level of detail about the issues to be discussed including purpose and key issues. The Council also has a 'Get involved in scrutiny' webpage which sets out how members of the public can get involved in the scrutiny process. The Council has engaged and informed stakeholders of service changes, for example in relation to changes to customer care centre opening hours there was a clear programme of communication to provide stakeholders with a number of opportunities to offer their views and ultimately to pre-warn users of the changes and the alternatives available. For further information visit [Get involved in scrutiny](#) or contact Catherine-Forbes Thompson, Head of Democratic Services, [forbecl@caerphilly.gov.uk](mailto:forbecl@caerphilly.gov.uk).

- **Conwy County Borough Council – Consultation on waste:**

In 2016, the Council became the first Council in England and Wales to trial four-weekly collections for residual waste. Early results of the trial, which includes around a fifth of households in the County, show a significant increase in recycling rates. The role of officers and key councillors in listening to residents and stakeholders, and modifying the trial to address their concerns, were key to its success. In particular, The 'Recycle More Survey' of all households in Conwy used a number of approaches to obtain people's views and achieved over 11,000 responses. For further information contact Andrew Wilkinson, Head of Neighbourhood Services, [andrew.wilkinson@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.wilkinson@conwy.gov.uk).

- **Gwynedd Council – ‘Gwynedd Challenge’:**

Between September and December 2015, Gwynedd Council started identifying possible service cuts by carrying out a comprehensive Gwynedd-wide public consultation in which residents, businesses and organisations were invited to have their say on the ‘long list’ of 118 possible service cut options that were under consideration. Over 2,100 questionnaire responses were received from Gwynedd residents, businesses and organisations. In addition over 615 members of the public attended a series of 32 public forums or drop in sessions. Further details, including a consultation booklet and the results of the public consultation exercise, are available on the Council’s website: [Gwynedd Challenge](#) or contact Geraint Owen, Head of Corporate Support, [geraintowen@gwynedd.llyw.cymru](mailto:geraintowen@gwynedd.llyw.cymru).

- **Newport City Council – Newport Fairness Commission:**

Newport City Council became the first Council in Wales to establish a Fairness Commission in 2012, and the Commission continues to operate. The role of the Commission is set out on its web page: ‘Fairness Commissions are independent bodies set up by councils to advise them on the best use of resources and powers to achieve the fairest outcomes for local people. The Newport Fairness Commission met for the first time in November 2012, becoming the first of its kind in Wales. Its role is to keep issues concerning fairness on the public agenda and to monitor and advise on how these issues are considered in the council’s decisions and policies. This has taken place within the context of the problems which need to be addressed by the city as a whole – namely of administering severe cuts in local government funding, exacerbated by rising demand due to demographics, increased expectations and other budgetary pressures.’<sup>7</sup> The Fairness Commission reviews all of the Council’s savings proposals and the Council actively considers the views of the Commission in its decision making. For further information visit Newport Fairness Commission or [contact one.newport@newport.gov.uk](mailto:contact.one.newport@newport.gov.uk).

<sup>7</sup> [Newport Fairness Commission](#)



- **Isle of Anglesey County Council – working in partnership to improve consultation and engagement:**

Significant service changes are developed with public, stakeholder and Council staff involvement. The Council has agreed a public consultation protocol with Medrwn Môn, a voluntary community council who provide external engagement expertise and support voluntary and community groups on the island. Through this partnership, Medrwn Môn has developed a joint Engagement and Consultation Board (Board) with the Council and adopted the Community Voices principles of engaging with hard to reach communities. The Board has representation from across the Council, including officers and elected members, Community Voices and Medrwn Môn staff. The Council has also adopted the National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales<sup>8</sup> to help engage more effectively with the public and stakeholders in general. For further information contact Neville Evans, [nevilleevans@ynymon.gov.uk](mailto:nevilleevans@ynymon.gov.uk) or Gethin Morgan, [gethinmorgan@ynysmon.gov.uk](mailto:gethinmorgan@ynysmon.gov.uk).

- **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council – ‘RCT Together’:**

To help maintain services in light of reductions in funding, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council is working with local communities and the voluntary sector to explore alternative delivery models, to explore the possibility of them maintaining some services which the Council will no longer be able to provide. The approach includes asking the local community and the voluntary sector for expressions of interest to run Council services and where appropriate providing support such as help in developing business plans. For further visit [RCT Together](#) or contact Debra Hanney, Community Asset Development Officer, [debra.hanney@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:debra.hanney@rctcbc.gov.uk).

- **Vale of Glamorgan Council – Public Participation at Council Meetings:**

Several councils allow the public to ask questions/speak at Council or Committee meetings including the Vale of Glamorgan Council. In the Vale of Glamorgan this opportunity is well publicised on the Council’s website including a link on the front page ‘Public Participation at Council Meetings’ which enables visitors to the website to be able to access information on the process with one click from the home page. For further information visit Public [Participation at Council Meetings](#) or contact Jeff Wyatt, Head of Democratic Services, [jrwyatt@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:jrwyatt@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk).

8 [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#)

- **Pembrokeshire County Council – Webcasting of Overview and Scrutiny Meetings:**

As well as webcasting Council and Cabinet meetings, some councils including Pembrokeshire County Council now webcast all of their Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. This makes it easier for members of the public and interested stakeholders to observe the scrutiny of service change proposals when discussed by Committees. This improves the potential for information sharing with communities as to the reasons why proposals are agreed/discounted, as well as improving the transparency of decision making and accountability arrangements. For further information visit [Webcasts](#) or contact Susan Sanders, [susan.sanders@pembrokeshire.gov.uk](mailto:susan.sanders@pembrokeshire.gov.uk).

- **Torfaen County Borough Council – Public engagement mechanisms:**

The Council has a number of arrangements to engage and inform stakeholders in service change considerations including:

- ‘Torfaen Talks’ residents’ magazine and active use of social media.
- Council established ‘People's Panel’, a consultative panel of people living in Torfaen, which aims to give local people a chance to have their say about public services and life in the County Borough.
- all the Council’s active and future consultations can be found on the Council’s website, My Say. This provides citizens with an opportunity to reflect their views and highlight what they expect from local public services.
- staff engagement and ‘Ask Alison’ – the Council undertakes an annual staff survey, staff can post questions via ‘Ask Alison’ on the Council’s Intranet to the Chief Executive and there is a weekly electronic staff bulletin as well as regular ‘Notes’ after every Leadership Team. Members of the Leadership Team also take it in turn to write blogs.
- the Council held joint scrutiny workshops in relation to the setting of its 2016-17 budget and its savings plans for both 2016-17 and 2017-18. These workshops were open to the press and public.

- the use of social media to consult and engage stakeholders, including a live Twitter feed during its Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. A large proportion of the Council’s committee meetings are webcast live, as well as the videos then being made available to watch online.
  - effective engagement of stakeholders in service changes. This included scrutiny and public engagement in the introduction of ‘skinny’ waste bins; and engagement of community councils in changes to public toilets.
  - For further information contact Richard Edmunds, Head of Democratic Services, [richard.edmunds@torfaen.gov.uk](mailto:richard.edmunds@torfaen.gov.uk).
- **Cardiff Council – Engaging with public and staff:**

The Cardiff Debate was established in 2014 as a three-year programme of community engagement and has been a fundamental feature of the Council’s Organisational Development Programme (ODP). It has provided an ongoing conversation with citizens, communities and partners. The approach to consultation varies, from drop-in workshops, social media debates, online consultation and on-street engagement. The Council also seeks views on residents’ satisfaction with Council services through the annual Ask Cardiff residents’ survey, which receives well over 4000 responses. Questions concerning specific changes to services have been included in both Ask Cardiff and Cardiff Debate. Improving staff engagement and consultation is also one of the programmes within the ODP. The Council undertakes employee roadshows involving the Chief Executive and SMT, and staff meetings with the Chief Executive as part of ‘Have your Say’ sessions. A staff Ambassador Network has been created. In November 2016, the Council also launched a new ‘staff app’ to improve communication with staff. For further information contact Joe Reay, Head of Performance & Partnerships, [Joseph.Reay@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:Joseph.Reay@cardiff.gov.uk).

## Exhibit 4: learning points – consultation and engagement

### Potential learning points – consultation and engagement

Councils could:

- set out the results/findings of consultation and engagement activity in reports, business cases or savings proposals.
- consider the potential for involving stakeholders in developing proposals for service change, rather than just consultation and engagement on pre-determined proposals.
- review the adequacy and timeliness of information on service change that is made available to the public. For example Cabinet, and Overview and Scrutiny forward work programmes, minutes, agendas and reports.
- consider how transparent and clear arrangements are for stakeholders to proactively understand and engage in decision making. This could include using the websites of other councils to compare, but also considering new and innovative ways to communicate and encourage engagement with stakeholders in decision making.
- consider different ways to engage and involve stakeholders in the service change process – the Newport Fairness Commission and 'RCT Together' are potential examples of this.

## Councils should develop arrangements to systematically monitor the impact of making significant changes to services

### What we looked for

- 31 We looked for evidence that councils identify what they need to monitor and evaluate to assess the impact of their decisions to make changes to services, along with clarity around who is responsible for monitoring the impact of decisions. We also looked for evidence that there was scrutiny of the impact of service changes, and whether or not transition arrangements had been properly planned for when service changes were implemented. We also considered the transparency of arrangements for monitoring the impact of service change and the robustness of arrangements to monitor the realisation of anticipated budget savings from service changes. We looked at how Council's arrangements ensured they are fulfilling their equalities duty to assess the impact of proposed service changes on groups who share protected characteristics.

## What we found

- 32 Many councils have arrangements for monitoring the achievement of anticipated savings arising from service changes. However many councils have yet to develop arrangements to systematically monitor the impact of making changes to services on local communities. In some councils arrangements are in place but they are not always transparent with either little public scrutiny or a lack of clarity as to when and how Overview & Scrutiny Committees may become involved in monitoring the impact of service changes. We also found examples where councils had made clear provision for transition arrangements when planning to make changes to services.

### Some examples of arrangements that councils have put in place include:

- **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council – Systematic involvement of scrutiny in monitoring the impact of service change:**

In response to an earlier Wales Audit Office review of service change decision making, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees have been given the role of systematically monitoring the impact of service changes at six months and 12 months following the implementation of a service change. These reviews are built into scrutiny forward work programmes, whose level of detail the Council has also worked to improve. Officers involved in the service change prepare a report and present it to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee. For further information contact Karyl May, Head of Democratic Services, [karyl.may@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:karyl.may@rctcbc.gov.uk).

- **Flintshire County Council – Monitoring impact and transition arrangements:**

Arrangements to monitor the impact of decisions are transparent with a clear specification of objectives and how success will be measured/monitored. For significant service changes in operating model such as the Council's approach to Alternative Delivery Models, a 'Transition Risk Plan' is used to risk assess any issues associated with the service change proposal, together with mitigating actions. For further information contact Ian Bancroft, [ian.bancroft@flintshire.gov.uk](mailto:ian.bancroft@flintshire.gov.uk).

## Exhibit 5: learning points – monitoring and evaluation

### Potential learning points – monitoring and evaluation

Councils could:

- set out, at the point of decision, what the key measures of success and anticipated impact of changes to services will be, and when and by who the impact will be monitored and publically reported.
- agree an overall and transparent approach to monitoring impact that clearly sets out the roles of officers/members and includes clear provision for transparent public reporting and scrutiny.
- consider opportunities to increase the involvement of the public, partners and service users in reviews of the impact of significant service changes including through systematic and transparent public reporting.

## Councils should routinely review their decision-making arrangements and make changes to service change decision-making processes where appropriate

### What we looked for

- 33 We looked for evidence that councils regularly review the effectiveness of their decision-making arrangements, to identify any weaknesses and to address them. In exploring these areas we looked for evidence that councils seek to learn from their experiences of delivering service changes and sought to improve their arrangements.

### What we found

- 34 All councils review their decision-making arrangements through the development of their Annual Governance Statements. We also found that a number of councils consider and refine their arrangements for delivering service change building on their experiences, although the extent to which councils proactively identify and address weaknesses in their arrangements varies. Making significant changes to services will inevitably create risks, and significant changes of this nature do not always go according to plan. It was positive to note that in some councils where previous attempts to make significant service changes had not been successful, these had been used as learning experiences to further strengthen arrangements.

## Some examples of approaches include:

- **Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council – continuing to refine arrangements through self-review:**

The Council has continued to review and refine its governance arrangements for delivering service change, and made a number of incremental changes. Examples of changes include restructuring the Council's risk register, report template and business plan template to reflect the requirements of the WFG Act. The Council also introduced Cabinet workshops with Chief Officers to scrutinise and challenge service change proposals as a result of feedback from Cabinet Members. More recently officers have also identified the need to strengthen the role of scrutiny in service change decision making, as well as strengthen arrangements for monitoring the impact of service changes. For further information contact Andrew Mogford, Business Change Manager, [andrew.mogford@merthyr.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.mogford@merthyr.gov.uk).

- **City and County of Swansea – Cabinet away days:**

The Council has held Cabinet away days around each anniversary of the start of its Commissioning Review process, firstly in October 2015 and then again in September 2016. The away days were used to contemplate what worked well and what did not, and follow up on previous years' recommendations from the workshops. Learning from these days has resulted in more importance being given to the scoping stage to ensure that it captures cross cutting issues, avoids a narrow service based approach, and also includes prevention, culture and demand management principles from the perspectives of both within and outside the organisation. For further information contact Sarah Caulkin, [sarah.caulkin@swansea.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.caulkin@swansea.gov.uk).

- **Conwy County Borough Council – oversight and scrutiny of collaborative arrangements:**

As a result of learning from a previous collaboration in 2013, the Council developed Collaboration Implementation Guidance which must be referred to when implementing a major service change. This guidance links directly into the Council's Project Management Framework and ensured changes were made to the monitoring and degree of member scrutiny in collaborative arrangements to strengthen governance. For further information contact Emma Roberts, Corporate Modernisation Manager [emma.roberts@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:emma.roberts@conwy.gov.uk).

- **Vale of Glamorgan Council – Strengthening equality impact assessments:**

Following a judicial review challenge to a proposed service change, the Council recognised there were opportunities to strengthen arrangements for ensuring that equalities considerations had been properly taken into account in decision making. The Council now captures specific elements of the Equalities Impact Assessment in the main body of the report rather than just in the Appendix. The inclusion of more detailed information in the main report raises the profile of equalities considerations and contributes to more informed decision making. The Council also introduced built-in 'breaks' to the Equality Impact Assessment process whereby officers from service areas who were completing the assessments are required to contact the corporate equalities team. For further information contact Huw Isaac, Head of Performance and Development, [hisaac@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk](mailto:hisaac@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk).

- **Cardiff Council – Peer Review of the Organisational Development Programme:**

The Council reviews and refreshes its Organisational Development Programme (ODP) annually. Its Policy Review and Performance (PRAP) Scrutiny committee and Cabinet receive the annual review. 2016-17 was the final year of the current three-year ODP. The Council commissioned an independent review of the ODP in 2017. It is intended that this will inform and shape the purpose of the ODP going forward.

The Council has also developed a Control Risk Self-Assessment (CRSA) to provide assurance on the ODP projects during the varying stages of their lifecycles. Internal Audit has undertaken an initial pilot of the CRSA on some of the ODP projects. For further information contact Sue Powell, Group Auditor, [sue.powell@cardiff.gov.uk](mailto:sue.powell@cardiff.gov.uk).



- **Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council – Community Integrated Model review of service changes:**

The Council carried out a formal review of the service changes as part of the Community Integrated Model. This was undertaken with external advocacy support to seek people's views on how they view the new remodelled service and, to reflect on the journey undertaken by all involved including parents/carers and frontline teams. The report concluded that in future service re-models external advocacy will be commissioned to support individuals directly affected by change. As part of the process advocates were asked to facilitate independent workshops on the consultation with Service Users to ensure impartial feedback. For further information contact Lisa Livingstone – Project Manager Community Care, [l.e.livingstone@npt.gov.uk](mailto:l.e.livingstone@npt.gov.uk).

- **Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council – evaluating the results of consultation:**

For each consultation exercise undertaken on service change the council also prepares an evaluation report on the consultation process to capture learning and make improvements to its consultation arrangements.

In 2015-16 the Council used a range of methods to consult on service change proposals. The Council report details the comprehensive distribution of the consultation materials, which included:

- in excess of 47,000 copies of the consultation booklet distributed.
- electronic copies of the booklet sent to 25,000 Council library card holders.
- copies of the materials made available at doctors' surgeries, Council libraries, leisure centres, Communities First offices and One4All centres.
- a YouTube video produced to provide an easy to understand introduction to the consultation, how people could engage in it, as well as providing details of the service change proposals themselves.
- wide promotion in the press and via social media, including the Council's Twitter account.

- 13 engagement sessions. There was also a session held in each of the five Day Nurseries specifically to discuss the Day Nurseries proposals. 'Young persons' versions of the Consultation booklet were also developed for use at Youth Forums and School Council sessions. Young people were also invited to attend a dedicated youth engagement event held at the Council's chamber in Clydach Vale

Over 500 responses to the Consultation were received. Questionnaires on service changes also asked respondents not just for their views, but also what the impact of the service changes on them as services users or their family will be. This helps the Council to be able to assess the impact of proposed changes and not just whether someone agrees or disagrees with the proposal. For further information contact Chris Davies, Corporate Policy & Consultation Officer, [christopher.s.davies@rctcbc.gov.uk](mailto:christopher.s.davies@rctcbc.gov.uk).

- **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council – reviewing arrangements for delivering service change:**

The Council reviewed its arrangements for identifying, approving and implementing service changes as part of its budget setting process for 2015-16. Officers collated the results of this review into a report which was presented to the Council's Joint Scrutiny Committee (Budget Monitoring) in September 2016. This report highlighted actions taken to implement recommendations from a similar 2014-15 review, and lessons learnt from the 2015-16 budget setting process.

For further information contact Stephen Gillingham, Temporary Lead Corporate Director/Head of Paid Service, [stephen.gillingham@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk](mailto:stephen.gillingham@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk).

## Exhibit 6: learning points – reviewing governance arrangements

### Potential learning points – reviewing governance arrangements

Councils could:

- put in place mechanisms to routinely undertake post project learning or equivalent following the determination of all significant service changes, and report the findings of the learning from both successful and unsuccessful projects to councillors and officers;
- pro-actively seek and share the learning and experiences of other councils in Wales in determining significant service changes in further developing governance arrangements, particularly in advance of undertaking any major service change; and
- celebrate successes and learn from failures – failed attempts to introduce service change are a valuable source of learning for improving governance arrangements. Proactively exploring and sharing lessons learned from ‘failures’ is a powerful lever for improving future decision-making. It can also demonstrate and promote that the Council is learning to better manage risks in the future.

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