

Setting of Well-being Objectives – Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

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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 56 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 Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - explain how Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) applied the sustainable development principle throughout in the process of setting its well-being objectives;
 - provide assurance on the extent that the Authority applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
 - identify opportunities for the Authority 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 the Authority 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 the Authority put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
 - Has the Authority considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
 - Has the Authority 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 the Authority, and we tailored the delivery to reflect its specific circumstances. We completed fieldwork for this review in September 2024.
- 9 We gathered our evidence in the following ways:
 - reviewing key documents; and
 - conducting interviews with key people involved with setting the well-being objectives.

How and when the Authority set its well-being objectives

- 10 The Authority commenced work on setting new well-being objectives during 2023 and then published its new objectives in March 2024. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.
- 11 The Authority published its well-being objectives as part of its [Community Risk Management Plan](#) (CRMP).

Exhibit 1: Mid and West Wales FRA well-being objectives 2024 to 2040

We will improve our organisational culture to ensure we operate within the standards expected of a modern-day Fire and Rescue Service.

We will remain committed to making improvements to our On-Call Duty system to support the needs of our communities.

We will review the risks within our communities and to our people.

We will review and implement changes to the way in which we respond to emergencies to meet the changing demands of our community.

We will regularly review our Prevention (Community Safety) and Protection (Business Fire Safety) strategies to target and support the most vulnerable in our communities.

We will engage and consult with our communities to understand their expectations of us.

We will work in an environmentally friendly and sustainable way.

We will evolve our fleet and equipment requirements so we can effectively respond to emergencies.

What we found

The Authority has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives but has not yet fully developed how it supports delivery, including aligning resources and measuring impact more

The process for setting the well-being objectives

- 12 The Authority clearly reflected on previous objective setting and applied its learning when setting new objectives. The CRMP is a deliberately ambitious, long-term

document that replaces previous annual improvement plan setting⁵. This change followed a reflective process by officers about the areas for improvement in previous corporate and well-being objective planning. This demonstrates a positive approach to learning that helps support service improvement and demonstrate application of the sustainable development principle.

- 13 The reflective process also enabled the Authority to promote greater buy-in from the wider Service. Station visits complemented the internal intelligence gathering to listen to officer views about past objectives. This helped the Authority consider the purpose of the Service more clearly in its objectives. This may help the Authority in its delivery to meet objectives due to greater likelihood of strategic clarity and buy-in.
- 14 The Authority used a range of data and intelligence to inform setting the CRMP. This included a comprehensive analysis of its strategic operating environment and a thorough internal engagement process to collate intelligence from officers. This helped the Authority develop its plan on a clear internal evidence base to expand on with external information.
- 15 The Authority looked to involve others when setting its objectives. Officers attended meetings with the six Public Services Boards (PSBs) that the Authority is part of, as well as presenting at 16 Town and Community Council meetings. In addition, the Authority consulted the public on its draft plan for ten weeks. Combined, this external engagement aimed to add to the Authority's evidence base on the views of the draft plan.
- 16 Despite novel, planned approaches to promote engagement opportunities, the Authority received a low response rate. This included QR-code adverts in transport hubs to link to the consultation. Overall, the Authority received 227 responses, of which 51.5% were internal to the Authority. Officers recognised that this was disappointing and could be strengthened. Effective involvement helps bodies ensure they consider the opinions of the diverse communities served and includes them in delivery.
- 17 The Authority clearly documented how its objectives align and support other bodies' objectives. Officers analysed the six PSB well-being plans to find areas of alignment with the Authority's objectives as part of its evidence base. It also added the corporate objectives set by wider partners, such as councils, NHS bodies, police bodies, and relevant central government bodies. The Authority also considered the objectives set by the other Welsh and UK FRAs to provide an industry context. This demonstrated the Authority considering how to maximise its contribution through alignment, whilst also remaining appropriately sector related.

⁵ A change in Welsh Government guidance enabled this change to ensure the Authority discharges its duty to set annual improvement objectives under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

Planning to deliver the well-being objectives

- 18 The CRMP demonstrated the Authority's ambitious planning timescale. The actions for each objective are colour-coded to illustrate the intended short, medium, and long-term focus. This shows that the Authority recognised that change can have differing timescales to be impactful. Taking a long-term approach to planning clearly illustrates the Authority's application of the sustainable development principle.
- 19 However, the Authority currently has a limited consideration of how it will make sure it can deliver its objectives in detail. This is due to the approach taken by the Authority. It plans to complete a public consultation process to inform future planning in 2025. As a result, the CRMP currently does not outline how resources will be allocated to deliver its objectives. The Authority has also not assessed or allocated the required resources to deliver each objective within clear, time bound delivery plans.
- 20 Whilst officers showed awareness of some risks and impacts of not clearly resourcing plans, it means that there may be uncertainty in how realistic and deliverable the plan is. Understanding the financial, human, and other resources required to deliver a plan is critical to ensuring successful implementation. By detailing how the Medium Term Financial Plan and Annual Budget are directed towards the achievement of well-being objectives, for example, it enables resources to be clearly directed to key priorities.
- 21 The CRMP clearly identified collaboration as a delivery enabler, but did not fully develop the detail to understand its impact on delivery. Interviewees were able to identify opportunities for collaboration, such as community safety, but it is not clear how the Authority understands what will be delivered in partnership across objectives. Consequently, it is not clear how the Authority assures itself about the contribution and accountability of partners. Having a planned approach to collaboration helps partners understand their responsibilities, their commitment, and then to be accountable for outcomes.

Monitoring the well-being objectives

- 22 Performance measures are not yet in place to understand progress towards objectives. Current reporting focuses on recording activity rather than their outcomes and impact on the community, Authority, and objectives. Having clear, measurable outcomes helps the Authority assure itself of its performance and take mitigatory action if performance trends in the wrong direction. During fieldwork, officers stated the measures are currently under development and will also follow a public consultation process.
- 23 However, the Authority has developed a monitoring mechanism for each objective. Each objective has a lead officer and a monitoring group that identifies activity quarterly. The groups quarterly feed into an overall performance monitoring group, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer, and includes a range of officers and trade union

representatives. The lead officers also give quarterly updates to the Performance, Audit, and Scrutiny Committee (PASC) following feedback from members. This is a clear process for discussing and reporting activity.

Recommendations

Delivery of the current plan

- R1 To support the effective delivery of, and accountability for, its well-being objectives, the Authority should:
- 1.1 develop delivery plans to support implementation that are clearly resourced and ensure that wider operational and financial plans, such as the MTFP, clearly consider resourcing the delivery of objectives to ensure realistic deliverability. This should include the identification of future financial risks and their potential impact on deliverability.
 - 1.2 develop outcome measures to provide a strategic focus to oversight of performance and progress.
 - 1.3 develop a clearer understanding of when and how partners will support the delivery of its WBOs.

Learning for future planning

- R2 To provide greater levels of public involvement, the Authority should work with other public bodies to apply learning to increase response rates at different points in objective development and ensure it fully considers the opinions of the diverse community it serves.

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 Authority acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives? | |
| Planning: Was the process the Authority put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle? | |
| Has the Authority 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 Authority has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the Authority's understanding of the 'as is'/ short-term need.• The Authority 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 <p>The Authority has sought to understand the root causes of problems so that it can address negative cycles and intergenerational challenges through its well-being objectives.</p> |
| <p>Has the Authority involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Authority uses the results of involvement to help select its well-being objectives. That involvement – whether primary, secondary or a combination – reflects the full diversity of the population. • Involvement reflects good practice and advice from the Future Generations Commissioner. |
| <p>Has the Authority considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The well-being objectives have been designed to improve well-being in the broadest sense and make a contribution across the seven national well-being goals. • The well-being objectives have been designed to reflect and capitalise on the connections between different areas of work. • There is a well-developed understanding of how the well-being objectives impact on/relate to what other public bodies are trying to achieve and opportunities to work together. |
| <p>Has the Authority designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Authority 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. |

Resourcing and delivery: Has the Authority considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?

Has the Authority 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 Authority has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer term objectives.
- The Authority has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.

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

- The Authority is drawing on its knowledge of partners' objectives/activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.

Monitor and review: Has the Authority put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?

Has the Authority developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?

- 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 Authority to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.

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

- The Authority 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 Authority 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 Authority 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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