

# Setting of well-being objectives – City and County of Swansea 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 goals.<sup>1</sup> 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 objectives.<sup>2</sup> We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025.<sup>3</sup>
- 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 prevention.<sup>4</sup>
- 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Section 15 (1) (a) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

## Carrying out our examination at City and County of Swansea Council

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
  - explain how City and County of Swansea Council (the Council) applied the sustainable development principle throughout in the process of setting its well-being objectives;
  - provide assurance on the extent that the Council applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
  - identify opportunities for the Council to further embed the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives in future.
- 7 We set out to answer the question ‘to what extent has the Council 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 Council put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
  - Has the Council considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
  - Has the Council 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 Council, and we tailored the delivery to reflect its specific circumstances.
- 9 We gathered our evidence in the following ways:
  - reviewing key documents;
  - running a workshop with key officers and Members who were involved with setting the well-being objectives; and
  - carrying out a final clarification meeting on outstanding issues with key individuals in addition to the above.
- 10 We also provided some informal feedback to officers on the key findings from our work prior to sharing this report.

## How and when the Council set its well-being objectives

- 11 The Council's new Corporate Plan 2023-2028 – ‘Delivering a successful and sustainable Swansea’ (the Corporate Plan) was adopted by the Council on the 30 March 2023. The Corporate Plan is structured around the Council's six new Well-being Objectives, these being:

- safeguarding people from harm....so that our citizens are free from harm and exploitation;
  - improving education and skills....so that everyone in Swansea gains the skills and qualifications they need to succeed in life;
  - transforming our economy and infrastructure....so that Swansea has a thriving mixed use City Centre and a local economy that will support the prosperity of our citizens;
  - tackling poverty and enabling communities....so that every person in Swansea can achieve their potential;
  - delivering on nature recovery and climate change....so that we maintain and enhance nature and biodiversity in Swansea, reduce our carbon footprint and tackle climate change;
  - transformation and financial resilience....so that we and the services that we provide are sustainable and fit for the future;
- 12 The Council is required to publish a well-being statement under the Well-being of Future Generations Act, which it has incorporated into its new Corporate Plan that is published on the Council's website.
- 13 Over the last twelve months the Council, in recognition of the need to update its corporate arrangements, has been undertaking an extensive refresh of its corporate policy and strategic landscape, including refreshing its Digital and Workforce Strategies. A key part of this refresh has also been to review its approach to its Corporate Plan and in how it positions its new Well-being Objectives (WBOs). In the drafting of its new Corporate Plan the Council has applied lessons learned from the previous setting of WBOs. These key lessons included:
- the development of a clearer long-term vision for Swansea that the new WBO's are more closely aligned with; and
  - a focus on ensuring that there was better alignment between the Council's and the Public Service Boards (PSB) WBOs.

## What we found

The Council has applied the Sustainable Development Principle in setting its Well-being Objectives. Embedding its approach to engagement and performance monitoring will further strengthen this

## The process for setting well-being objectives

### Evidence Base

- 14 The Council has used a wide range of evidence to inform the setting of its well-being objectives. It has clearly shown how it has used evidence which considers short, medium and longer-term risks and needs. This included:
- Annual Report and self-Assessment 2021-2022
  - Council's Recovery Plan
  - Council's Policy Commitments Statement 7 July 2022
  - Council's Corporate Risk Register
  - Swansea PSB Assessment of Local Wellbeing 2022;
  - Welsh Government's Future Trends Report
  - Future Generations Commissioners Report 2020
- 15 For five of its WBOs, other than for the one focused on Safeguarding where a slightly different process was used, the Council drafted a document that describes why the priority area has become a WBO and provided an analysis of the evidence that it has used to inform its decision. For each of the five WBOs, the Council undertook a detailed IIA assessment which provides additional consideration of wider impacts. In our view, this approach provides a clear rationale and evidence base for the setting of the Council's WBOs.

### Consultation and Involvement

- 16 Whilst the Council did seek to engage citizens directly on its new WBOs, through a specific consultation exercise, the response rate was low and this engagement did not reach the full diversity of the population. In addition to this specific consultation the Council also drew evidence from existing engagement and consultation

exercises for example; its 'WBO temperature check'<sup>5</sup> from Spring 2022, its climate change survey in 2021 and a stakeholder consultation workshop around its approach to economic development which took place in June 2021. However, in our view the Council needs to strengthen how it engages with citizens on its WBOs.

- 17 The Council has reflected on its approaches to engagement and involvement and has recognised that it needs to do more to engage particular groups such as older people. It has recently adopted a new Consultation and Engagement Strategy and this and its recent work with the 'Coproduction Lab' and resultant proposed Coproduction Policy should provide useful frameworks for continuing to improve engagement and coproduction with its citizens.

## **Planning to improve well-being**

- 18 The Council's Corporate Plan and the Individual IIA's completed for five of the WBOs include a clear narrative of how the WBOs consider the National Goals, the five Ways of Working, how the new WBO supports the Council's other WBOs and wider impacts. The IIA also show the relationship between the Council WBOs and PSB WBOs. Having this wider understanding of the impact of its WBOs should ensure the Council is better placed to design and deliver effective steps to improve the well-being of Swansea.
- 19 The Council's WBOs have been set with the consideration of addressing both short and longer term needs/challenges and preventing things from getting worse. Good examples of this are its WBO around climate change and with its centralised approach to tackling poverty. In support of its approach to prevention the Council has an existing Prevention Strategy 2018-21. Whilst the principles in its Prevention Strategy should remain relevant, it could be brought up to date to ensure it effectively supports the Council's new Corporate Plan.
- 20 The Corporate Plan includes some measures which seek to measure the broader impacts on well-being for example: 'Report regularly on collaboration successes with Climate Charter signatories, PSB, citizens, schools, businesses, community groups and environmental partners'. Expanding its range of measures to include those which are outcome focused will enable the Council to strengthen how it measures its progress on improving the well-being of its citizens.
- 21 The Corporate Plan recognises the importance of working in partnership with others to deliver its WBOs and includes examples of exiting collaborations such as those around school improvement, safeguarding, economic regeneration and health. The Corporate Plan includes a brief narrative on how the Council will collaborate to deliver its WBOs. Whilst this recognition of the need to work with others is positive it will be important that the more detailed Service Plans include

<sup>5</sup> Council survey where citizens were asked their views about the Council's existing Well-being Objectives and performance delivering them and whether they were the right objectives to improve well-being in Swansea now and in the future.



more information on how and when it will collaborate with partners to deliver of its WBOs.

## **Delivering the well-being objectives**

- 22 The key mechanism for delivering its WBOs will be through steps and service objectives detailed within its recently refreshed Service Planning framework. At the time of our examination the Council was in the process of completing its Service Plans. The Council's new Service Plan template now requires services to demonstrate how their priorities support the Council's WBOs and to define what measures/KPIs and targets will be used to determine progress. It will be important that once Service Plans have been completed, the Council takes stock to ensure that the cumulative steps, actions and measures outlined within the Service Plans enable it to effectively deliver and measure the progress it is making on its WBOs.
- 23 In the development of its Corporate Plan the Council agreed several guiding principles which in our view were helpful in ensuring that the Corporate Plan was set in a context of available resources. Examples of these guidelines include:
- development of the Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan should be coterminous.
  - the Policy Commitments<sup>6</sup> should be steps, or incorporated into steps, to deliver each Priority.
  - steps to deliver each WBO should only be included in the Plan if they are fully funded.
- 24 This approach should provide a helpful baseline for the Council to clearly show how its resources are being used to deliver its WBOs. In our view it will be important for the Council to ensure that its ongoing financial planning reflects how future financial risks and savings targets will impact the delivery of its WBOs.

## **Monitoring the well-being objectives**

- 25 The Council's Annual Report 2021-2022 captures the progress it made on delivering its prior WBOs and that information helped shape its new WBOs and steps to deliver them. Including success measures in its new Corporate Plan and introducing a revised self-reflection tool, which requires services to specifically reflect on their performance against the Council's WBOs, should enable it to more effectively capture evidence to measure and track its progress.
- 26 For some of its WBOs, such as the one around tackling poverty, the Council has set a basket of measures that will cut across the organisation, including Finance, Housing, Education and Economic Development. Whilst some of the Council's WBOs are by definition more cross cutting in nature, in our view the Council should

<sup>6</sup> Policy Commitments drawn from the Political Manifesto of the current administration.

continue to develop measures for its other WBOs that both cut across the organisation and are more focus on outcomes and impacts.

- 27 The Council will continue to monitor progress on its current WBOs through its existing quarterly and annual performance monitoring arrangements. At the time of our review, aspects of its Performance Management Framework (PMF) and supporting software were being refreshed. It will be important that any new or refreshed PMF is embedded quickly to ensure that the Council is able to effectively monitor its progress on its WBOs.

## Recommendations

R1 The Council should continue to build on the progress it has made in applying the sustainable development principle in the setting of its well-being objectives by:

- embedding its new Consultation and Engagement strategy and its Co-Production Policy and using them to draw on the views of the full diversity of its citizens in designing and delivering its WBOs;
- clearly demonstrating how future financial savings and risks might impact the delivery of its WBOs;
- ensuring that cumulatively its refreshed Service Plans are able to effectively measure progress on delivering its WBOs; and
- ensuring that any future Service Plans also takes the opportunity to include expand the number of measures which focus on outcomes and impacts.

# 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. It also includes some 'positive indicators' that have been tailored to this examination, adapted from those we have previously used to inform our sustainable development principle examinations. This list is not a checklist, but rather an illustrative set of characteristics that describe what good could look like.

<b>To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?</b>	
<b>Planning: Was the process the body put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?</b>	
	<b>Positive indicators</b>

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

**Has the body used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?**

- 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:
  - 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.

**Has the body involved others in developing its well-being objectives?**

- 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.

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

<p><b>Has the body considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li><li>• The well-being objectives have been designed to reflect and capitalise on the connections between different areas of work.</li><li>• 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.</li></ul>
<p><b>Has the body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The body has set objectives that are sufficiently ambitious and have been designed to drive activity across the organisation.</li><li>• 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.</li></ul>
<p><b>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?</b></p>	
<p><b>Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>

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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The body has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.</li></ul>
<b>Has the body considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>
<b>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?</b>	
<b>Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, e.g., by focusing on outcomes that cut across departmental/ organisational boundaries and deliver multiple (including preventative) benefits over the longer term.</li><li>• There is a 'golden thread' that will allow the body to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.</li></ul>
<b>Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 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.</li></ul>

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

### development principle to setting its well-being objectives?

- 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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