

Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – Cyngor Gwynedd

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Report summary

- 1 We considered the service user perspective and outcome information provided to senior officers and senior members (senior leaders), and how this information is used at Cyngor Gwynedd (the Council).
- 2 Overall, we found that the Council provides senior leaders with a significant amount of performance information to help them understand the service users' perspective but information about outcomes is limited.
- 3 We have made three recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.

What we looked at – the scope of this audit

- 4 We focused on the performance information provided to senior officers and senior members (senior leaders) about service user perspective and outcomes, and how this information is used. We did not undertake a full review of the Council's performance management arrangements or an in-depth review of the quality of the data that the Council collects. Neither did the review focus on engagement with service users on specific service changes or the development of policies and strategies.
- 5 We have set out our audit questions and audit criteria in **Appendix 1**. The audit criteria essentially sets out what good looks like and what we would expect to find.
- 6 Overall, we were looking for performance information to be shared with senior leaders to help them understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users and how well they are helping the Council to achieve the outcomes it is working towards. We were also looking to see that senior leaders use this information to monitor progress and take action where necessary to improve outcomes.
- 7 This is an important part of arrangements to ensure that councils are securing value for money in the use of their resources. It is also an important way in which the Council can assure itself that it is acting in accordance with the 'involvement' way of working in taking steps to meet its well-being objectives. Without this information, it is difficult to see how senior leaders can understand whether their policies and actions are having the intended impact and make changes where they are not.
- 8 Our findings are based on document reviews and interviews with the Cabinet Member, Director and senior officer with responsibility for the Council's performance management arrangements. The evidence we have used to inform our findings is limited to these sources. We undertook this work during June 2023.
- 9 We set out to answer the question '**Does the Council's performance data enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes**

of its activities to effectively manage its performance?’ We did this by exploring the following questions:

- Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the perspective of service users?
- Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the outcomes of the Council’s activities?
- Does the Council have robust arrangements to ensure that the data provided is accurate?
- Does the Council use the information to help it achieve its outcomes?
- Does the Council review the effectiveness of its arrangements?

Why we undertook this audit

10 This audit was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General’s duties under section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 (the 2004 Act) and section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

11 We sought to:

- gain assurance that the performance information the Council provides to senior officers and elected members enables them to understand the service user perspective and the outcome of its activities;
- gain assurance that this information forms part of the Council’s arrangements to secure value for money in the use of its resources and its application of the sustainable development principle; and
- identify opportunities for the Council to strengthen its arrangements.

The Council’s performance reporting arrangements

12 The Council produces internal performance reports every two months. These reports include details of service performance and progress towards the Council’s well-being objectives. However, these reports are not circulated widely to members. They are usually just provided to the relevant head of service and Cabinet Member with the relevant portfolio. Twice a year, two members of the relevant scrutiny committee and a ‘shadow’ Cabinet member also attend the performance challenge meetings., The Council Leader attends one of these meetings for each department each year.

13 Cabinet Members also produce progress reports twice a year on their respective portfolios for the attention of their fellow Cabinet Members at a public meeting.

14 The Corporate Leadership Team, Cabinet and scrutiny committees are presented with various annual reports. These include the Council’s annual self-assessment,

annual performance report, complaints report and the Director of Social Services' report.

- 15 Our review focused on a sample of these key performance reporting mechanisms.

What we found

The Council provides senior leaders with a significant amount of performance information to help them understand the service users' perspective but information about outcomes is limited

The main performance reports presented to senior leaders place emphasis on the service user perspective enabling senior leaders to have a good understanding of the views of service users

- 16 The Council provides senior leaders with performance reports every two months, which include a significant amount of information which helps them to understand the service user perspective. For example, around a third of all measures within the performance reports we reviewed covered the service user perspective and this information was relevant to the Council's objectives.
- 17 The Council conducts regular customer satisfaction surveys in most service areas. In its internal performance reports, which are produced every two months, the Council provides analysis of these surveys and contextual information in a variety of forms (percentages; actual numbers of individuals; direct quotes; graphs) to help senior leaders understand the views of its service users. However, the impact of this information is limited as it is only shared with the relevant Cabinet member, a shadow member, two members of the relevant scrutiny committee and the relevant head of service. This information might be of further value if shared with all Cabinet members, given the cross-cutting nature of the Council's well-being objectives.
- 18 As we found that the Council was providing a significant amount of information on the views of service users to senior leaders, we explored whether this information was drawn from the full diversity of service users. We found that the Council does not always analyse respondents' characteristics. Without this, the Council cannot be assured that the service user perspective information it gathers is drawn from the full diversity of people including groups who share protected characteristics.

Senior leaders are provided with limited information on the outcomes of the Council's activities which limits their ability to effectively manage performance

- 19 Overall, we found there was limited performance information to help senior leaders understand the outcomes of the Council's activities. Instead, performance information focuses on actions and outputs.
- 20 The internal performance reports produced every two months and the Cabinet Member reports produced twice a year, on which senior leaders rely to understand and monitor performance, include limited information about outcomes. The information provided focuses on actions rather than evaluating the impact of those actions.
- 21 For example, the 'what has been achieved since the last meeting' section of the Economy and Community Department's performance report lists actions and has very little information on outcomes. Only one outcome was noted within a performance report on nine projects.
- 22 This limits senior leaders' ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities and whether it is meeting its objectives.

The Council's arrangements to check the accuracy of service user perspective and outcomes data are limited

- 23 The Council's individual service areas are responsible for ensuring that data provided to senior leaders is accurate. There is evidence that individual services have some arrangements in place to check the accuracy of performance information. However, these arrangements do not cover the accuracy of the Council's service user perspective and outcomes data. Given that the Council places a particular emphasis on the value of providing senior leaders with service user perspective information, we would expect that the Council's arrangements for checking the accuracy of its data would also cover this information.
- 24 Senior leaders are informed via the reports presented every two months where data, in general, has been cleansed. But the Council could not demonstrate that it has robust arrangements to ensure that the information provided to members about the perspective of service users and outcomes is accurate. As a result, there is a risk that decisions and action may be taken, and resources deployed based on inaccurate information.

The Council uses the service user information it has to make changes in the service areas but is restricted by its limited information on outcomes

- 25 When poor performance is identified via information on service user perspectives, changes are introduced at an operational level and the results are reported to senior leaders on how this improves the Council's progress towards achieving its objectives. The Council analyses service user perspective responses and provides

an explanation when this is deemed to be lower than 'satisfactory'; the remedial actions in that case are also noted and lessons learnt are shared with senior leaders.

- 26 However, as we found the Council provides limited information to help senior leaders understand the outcomes of its activities, logically the extent to which it can then use this information to make changes, is limited.

The Council's recent review of the effectiveness of its performance arrangements has led to improvements in its service user perspective information but has not addressed weaknesses in outcomes information

- 27 The Council recently conducted a review of the effectiveness of its performance management arrangements. As part of this, it identified the importance of service user perspective information and incorporated new measures within its reports. For example, six of the 21 measures related to service user perspective within the template 'dashboard' provided to managers following the review. This ratio demonstrates how the Council has emphasised the importance of providing senior leaders with an insight into customer satisfaction levels.
- 28 However, the Council has not reflected on the limited amount of outcome measures it currently has. If the Council cannot demonstrate whether and how it's achieving its outcomes, this undermines the effectiveness of its performance management arrangements.
- 29 The Council does not compare information on service user perspective or outcomes it collects with the information collected by similar organisations or collection methods. We do not mean comparing performance per se, but to help it learn how other organisations are providing information about service user perspectives and outcomes to help strengthen its own arrangements. This is an important element of arrangements to secure value for money.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

Information on the perspective of the service user

- R1** The Council should strengthen its arrangements to enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective by:
- sharing its performance information on service user perspective with a wider range of senior leaders to maximise its value given the cross-cutting themes of its well-being objectives; and

- assuring itself that that the information on the perspective of service users is drawn from the diversity of service users including groups who share protected characteristics.

Outcomes information

- R2** The Council should strengthen the information provided to senior leaders to help them evaluate whether the Council is delivering its objectives and intended outcomes.

Arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of data

- R3** The Council needs to assure itself that it has robust arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of the information it provides to senior leaders relating to service user perspective and outcomes.

Appendix 1

Key questions and what we looked for

Exhibit 2: key questions and what we looked for

The table below sets out the question we sought to answer in carrying out this audit, along with the audit criteria we used to arrive at our findings.

Level 1	
Does the Council's performance data enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of its activities to effectively manage its performance?	
Level 2	Audit Criteria ¹ (what we are looking for)
2.1 Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the perspective of service users?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The information is:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– relevant to the objectives the Council has set itself;– sufficient to enable an understanding of the service user perspective;– sufficient to provide an understanding of progress towards the outcomes the Council is planning to achieve;– drawn from the diversity of service users including groups who share protected characteristics; and– used to inform comparisons with the performance of similar bodies where relevant.• The Council has involved service users in determining which information to collect.
2.2 Does the performance information provided to senior leaders include appropriate information on the outcomes of the Council's activities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The information draws on a range of evidence sources to provide a holistic view of progress.• The information enables senior leaders to monitor progress over the short, medium and long term.• The information enables senior leaders to monitor the delivery of outcomes that cover multiple service areas and/or organisations.

¹ Our audit criteria have been informed by our cumulative knowledge of previous audit work, as well as the question hierarchy and positive indicators we have developed to support our sustainable development principle examinations.

Level 1

Does the Council's performance data enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of its activities to effectively manage its performance?

Level 2

Audit Criteria¹ (what we are looking for)

2.3 Does the Council have robust arrangements to ensure that the data provided is accurate?

- The Council has clear arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of the data it provides to senior leaders.
- Where weaknesses in data quality are identified, the Council addresses them.

2.4 Does the Council use the information to help it achieve its outcomes?

- Where poor performance is identified, the Council uses the information to make changes/interventions.
- There is evidence of the Council improving its progress towards its outcomes as a result of interventions.

2.5 Does the Council review the effectiveness of its arrangements?

- The Council reviews the information provided to senior leaders to ensure it is appropriate and relevant.
- The Council compares the information it collects with the information collected by similar organisations to identify opportunities to strengthen its arrangements.



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