

Setting of Well-being Objectives – Cyngor Gwynedd

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Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a ‘well-being duty’ on 48 public bodies. The duty requires those bodies to set and publish ‘well-being objectives’ that are designed to maximise their contribution to achieving each of the Act’s seven national well-being goals¹. They must also take all reasonable steps, in exercising their functions, to meet those objectives.
- 2 The Auditor General must carry out examinations to assess the extent to which public bodies have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives². We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025³.
- 3 To do something in accordance with the sustainable development principle means acting ‘in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. To achieve this, a public body must take account of the five ways of working: long term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention⁴.
- 4 We designed an assessment framework to enable us to assess the extent to which public bodies have applied the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives. **Appendix 1** sets out further information on our approach, including a set of ‘positive indicators’ that illustrate what good could look like.
- 5 In designing our approach, we considered what we could reasonably expect from public bodies at this point in time. Public bodies should now be familiar with the sustainable development principle and ways of working and be seeking to apply them in a meaningful way. At the same time, we appreciate that public bodies are still developing their experience in applying the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives. Therefore, the examinations include consideration of how public bodies are applying their learning and how they can improve in future.

¹ The seven national well-being goals are: a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales.

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

³ The Auditor General must carry out examinations over the period set out in the Act, which begins one year before a Senedd election and ends one year and one day before the following Senedd election.

⁴ Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Carrying out our examination at Cyngor Gwynedd

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - explain how Cyngor Gwynedd (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 overall 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.
- 9 We gathered our evidence in the following ways:
 - observing Council meetings;
 - reviewing key documents; and
 - carrying out a small number of interviews.

How and when Cyngor Gwynedd set its well-being objectives

- 10 Cyngor Gwynedd (the Council) commenced work on setting new well-being objectives during 2022 then published its seven new objectives in March 2023. **Exhibit 1** sets out those well-being objectives.
- 11 The Council published its well-being objectives as part of its Council Plan for 2023-28, referred to as its priority areas, and within its well-being statement that is required under the Act. Both the Council Plan for 2023-28 and the well-being statement for 2023-24 can be viewed on the [Council's website](#).

Exhibit 1: Cyngor Gwynedd's well-being objectives 2023-28

TOMORROW'S GWYNEDD Giving our children and young people the best possible start in life

A PROSPEROUS GWYNEDD Strengthening the economy and supporting the people of Gwynedd to earn a decent salary

A HOMELY GWYNEDD Supporting the people of Gwynedd to live in suitable and affordable homes in their communities

A CARING GWYNEDD Supporting the residents of Gwynedd to live full and safe lives in our communities

A WELSH GWYNEDD Ensuring that we give our residents every possible opportunity to use the Welsh language in the community

A GREEN GWYNEDD Protecting the county's natural beauty, and responding positively to the climate change crisis

AN EFFICIENT GWYNEDD Putting the residents of Gwynedd first and treating them fairly and ensuring that the Council performs effectively and efficiently

What we found: The Council has applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives and there are opportunities to strengthen aspects of this, as well as the arrangements to support delivery and monitoring

The process for setting the well-being objectives

Planning process and evidence base

- 12 The Council has used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how these might change over time in preparing its current well-being objectives.
- 13 For example, the Council's information sources for setting its new objectives were its local Public Service Board Well-being Assessment (published in 2022) and its recent Ardal Ni regeneration framework engagement work. The Council also considered how it performed against its previous well-being objectives.
- 14 Amongst other issues, root causes of problems were discussed during member workshops which led to adoption of projects of a preventative nature. For example, improving sustainable tourism for the benefit of the community. Member workshops were held to discuss and prioritise draft projects and the Leadership Team and Cabinet went on to establish the draft well-being objectives. In reflecting on its arrangements for the 2018-23 period, the Council decided to combine its well-being objectives with its priority areas and backbench members were involved at an earlier point on this occasion.
- 15 However, as the Council is now inviting Heads of Departments to add any projects and others may be subject to change for the 2024-25 period, it is unclear whether the Council plans to continue to refer to emerging data as it becomes available when making any changes to its well-being objectives' projects. Without doing so the Council might not be fully informed on information available to it on the future risks, opportunities and challenges specific to Gwynedd and beyond.

Consultation and involvement

- 16 The Council has used a combination of primary and secondary involvement to help select its well-being objectives, but the Council cannot be assured that primary involvement was with the full diversity of the population.
- 17 The Council held a public consultation offering people an opportunity to influence the draft well-being objectives, introduced as 'priority areas', between 8 December 2022 and 3 January 2023. Paper copies were available at libraries and Siop

Gwynedd locations. The consultation was publicised in the press and social media and issued to organisations representing groups with protected characteristics. An elected member and some officers were disappointed that it only received 643 responses as they had hoped there would be more. This figure included responses from staff and elected members as well as community groups and other organisations such as town and community councils.

- 18 The Council analysed the demographic features of its consultation respondents and stated that no patterns were apparent between the opinions of those sharing protected characteristics. However, with such a low response rate and that many chose the 'prefer not to say' options, it might be difficult to draw any dependable patterns from this data.
- 19 The Council also used secondary sources of involvement from the Ardal Ni regeneration framework and the 2022 Well-being Assessment consultations. The response rate for these exercises was much higher and respondents were invited to provide monitoring information. However, it is unclear whether the Council has compared the local population's attributes with those of the respondents. As a result, it cannot be assured that its well-being objectives were informed by responses which reflect the full diversity of the county's residents.
- 20 The Council has identified some partners which will help it deliver parts of its well-being objectives. For example, the Council Plan states that the Council will work jointly with organisations such as the local health board and social housing association. However, the Council did not actively involve and discuss with potential partners, such as third sector organisations when consulting on the draft well-being objectives. Unless the Council actively involves other organisations during the development of the Council's priority areas and well-being objectives, it will be difficult to ensure that further opportunities to deliver cross-cutting ambitions with other partners are not missed.

Planning to improve well-being

- 21 The Council has not yet fully developed its understanding of how its well-being objectives impact on and relate to what other organisations are trying to achieve.
- 22 The Council did not explain how its own key corporate documents will contribute towards its well-being objectives nor what impact these objectives will have on national and regional bodies' strategies. Unless the Council coordinates its approach to assuring alignment between its well-being objectives and what it and others are trying to achieve, its ability to improve well-being and have a broad impact could be limited.
- 23 The Council's arrangements for prioritising projects under its draft well-being objectives considered balancing longer-term benefits with meeting the immediate needs of residents. Between August and September 2022, Council departments used a template to note their ideas for prospective Council Plan projects. The template included prompts to note which current issue or problem the project would help, what would be achieved within the first year and within the Plan's term. The

Council then held a workshop to select the favoured projects where elected members were informed that they should consider the long-term impact of the projects under the well-being objectives. As a result, many of its final projects have been designed to have long-term benefits. For example, within the Tomorrow's Gwynedd well-being objective, there is a project on promoting long-term well-being of school pupils by reducing the cost of sending children to school.

Planning to deliver and monitor the well-being objectives

- 24 The Council has not secured funding to deliver all its well-being objectives. For example, at the time of our review, the Council did not have a financial strategy such as a medium-term financial plan, making it difficult for us to assess to what extent the Council has considered how it will resource its well-being objectives over the course of the Council Plan.
- 25 The Council is aware that financial pressures may prevent it from delivering all its proposed objectives. In the report submitting the well-being objectives for approval, the Council stated that the combined cost of delivering all projects was greater than the expected funding available for delivering them. The Cabinet will decide which well-being objective activities to approve based on individual business cases. However, the Council has not yet established an arrangement to assess the impact of any changes to the expected outcomes of its approved well-being objectives during their five-year term.
- 26 Unless the Council has arrangements in place to assess the impact of not allocating funding for projects already approved in principle, it will not be fully informed when prioritising decisions and will be at risk of not delivering on the expected outcomes, including preventative benefits, of its well-being objectives.
- 27 Although the Council produces a lot of performance information, it is not currently drawn together in a way which shows progress towards its Council Plan and its strategic aims. For example, the bi-monthly performance reports for each service are only shared with the relevant Cabinet member, a shadow member, two members of the relevant scrutiny committee and the relevant head of department. It would be advantageous to demonstrate progress by bringing this information together at a corporate level considering the cross-cutting nature of the Council's well-being objectives.
- 28 The Council is in the process of establishing its milestones and measures to measure progress against its well-being objectives beyond the first year and has recognised the need to develop its arrangements further. For example, the Council states in its 2021-22 Self-Assessment that further work is needed to ensure that the Act and other statutory requirements are fully integrated within the Council's corporate planning frameworks, rather than doing so in a way that is reactive and fragmentary in nature.

Recommendations

Delivery of well-being objectives

- R1** The Council should ensure that budget-setting or producing of a medium-term financial plan are clearly aligned with the Council's new well-being objectives, so that there is clarity about how savings targets or known future financial uncertainty might affect the delivery of its current well-being objectives.

Appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements

- R2** The Council should ensure that it develops appropriate outcome measures and provides effective monitoring, reporting and scrutiny of the progress being made on delivering its current well-being objectives.

Improving well-being and having a broad impact

- R3** The Council should map how the Council's work could support partners' objectives, and vice versa when setting future well-being objectives so that it can identify opportunities to collaborate with others.

Involvement and consultation

- R4** The Council should extend its stakeholder networks when setting future well-being objectives and seek to involve people who reflect the full diversity of the county.

Appendix 1

Key questions and what we looked for

The table below sets out the question we sought to answer in carrying out this examination, along with some sub-questions to guide our evidence gathering. They are based on the positive indicators we have previously used in our sustainable development principle examinations, which were developed through engagement with public bodies and informed by advice and guidance from the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. This list is not a checklist, but rather an illustrative set of characteristics that describe what good could look like.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?	
Planning: Was the process the body put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?	
Has the body used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?	Positive indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The body has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the body's understanding of the 'as is'/ short-term need.• The body has set well-being objectives based on a good understanding of current and future need, risk and opportunities, including analysis of future trends. This is likely to be drawn from a range of local and national sources, such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Public Services Boards' well-being assessments– Regional Partnership Boards' population assessments– The results of local involvement/consultation exercises– Service monitoring and complaints– Future Trends report– Natural Resources Wales' State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales and Area Based Assessments

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>Has the body involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body uses the results of involvement to help select its well-being objectives. That involvement – whether primary, secondary or a combination – reflects the full diversity of the population. • Involvement reflects good practice and advice from the Future Generations Commissioner.
<p>Has the body 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 body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body has set objectives that are sufficiently ambitious and have been designed to drive activity across the organisation. • The objectives are designed to meet short and longer-term need. Where objectives are set over a short to medium timeframe, they are set in the context of longer-term considerations or ambitions.

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

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

- Resources have been allocated to ensure the objectives can be delivered over the short and medium term, but the body has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives.
- The body has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.

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

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

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

<p>Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, eg by focusing on outcomes that cut across departmental/organisational boundaries and deliver multiple (including preventative) benefits over the longer term.• There is a 'golden thread' that will allow the body to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.
<p>Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The body shows self-awareness and a commitment to improving how it applies the sustainable development principle so that it can do so in a meaningful and impactful way.• The body has learnt from setting previous well-being objectives and from applying the sustainable development principle more generally and has improved the process for setting its new well-being objectives.• The body has or plans to reflect on how it has applied the sustainable development principle in this round of setting well-being objectives.



Audit Wales

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

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