

Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – Isle of Anglesey County Council

Audit year: 2022-23

Date issued: November 2023

Document reference: 3927A2023

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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.
- 2 Overall, we found that limited performance information is provided to senior leaders at the Isle of Anglesey County Council (the Council) to enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities.
- 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 Executive member, head of service 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 May 2023.
- 9 We set out to answer the question '**Does the Council's performance information 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’s Leadership Team (senior officers) and its Executive (the Council Leader and portfolio-holding members) receive quarterly performance reports in the format of a corporate scorecard. This includes details of service performance, progress towards well-being objectives and financial monitoring information.

13 In addition to the quarterly corporate scorecards the Council Plan is monitored via:

- Quarterly performance management reports which focus on the service-related actions; and
- Quarterly Transformation Programme Boards.

14 Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

What we found

Limited performance information is provided to senior leaders to enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities

The performance information provided to senior leaders gives limited insight into the perspective of service users

- 15 Service user perspective is not well represented within the Council's current performance reporting. The main performance report, the quarterly corporate scorecard, provides limited information about the perspective of service users. For example, only five of the 74 measures included in the quarterly scorecards relate to service user perspective. It is, therefore, difficult to see how senior leaders would be able to understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users from this information.
- 16 Some executive members are provided with performance information on service user perspective in relation to some services within their portfolio, but not others. For example, leisure centres but not street cleanliness. Where there is information about the perspective of service users, this is not then reflected in the quarterly performance reports. For example, the Cyswllt Môn call centre records and monitors complaints and compliments, and comments received via social media are monitored which enable the departments to respond quickly. However, actions are only usually presented to the relevant head of service. Overall, the information provided is relatively limited and so does not enable senior leaders to fully understand the service user perspective.

Performance information provided to senior leaders largely focuses on outputs and activities rather than evaluating their impact

- 17 The Council draws its performance information from a range of evidence sources, such as social media, written survey responses and visitor satisfaction 'smiley' buttons. However, this information mainly focuses on activities rather than provide an assessment of outcomes.
- 18 The Council states in its 2021-22 Self-Assessment report that it has a high degree of confidence that it is achieving its intended outcomes. However, the report does not set out what the outcomes are. The report mainly describes plans and actions.
- 19 We found some limited examples of outcomes information in the quarterly scorecards. However, overall, the information provided did not enable senior leaders to understand the impact and outcomes of the Council's activities. This

limits senior leaders' ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities and whether it is achieving its desired outcomes.

The Council does not have arrangements to ensure that performance information reflecting the service user perspective and outcomes is accurate

- 20 The Council has a Corporate Planning and Performance Management Handbook which set out the Council's performance management framework. However, it does not refer to arrangements to check the accuracy of data.
- 21 Overall, we found that the Council doesn't have comprehensive arrangements to check the accuracy of its service user perspective and outcomes information. As a result, there is a risk that action and decisions may be taken, and resources deployed based on inaccurate information.

As information provided on outcomes and the perspective of service users is limited, the extent to which the Council can use this information to help it achieve its outcomes is also limited

- 22 As set out above, our main finding is that performance information provided to senior leaders does not generally enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities. Therefore, it follows that the extent to which the Council uses the service user perspective and outcomes information to help it achieve its outcomes from this performance information is limited.
- 23 Where we did find examples of the Council providing information on the perspective of service users and outcomes, we found the Council then using this information to make changes. For example, the Appendix of the most recent Annual Complaints Report lists lessons learnt and actions taken in respect of complaints. The report also includes the numbers of compliments for each service. But despite there being twice as many compliments as complaints, the report doesn't include any further commentary on the compliments. This is a missed opportunity to give senior leaders information which would help them gain assurance that the services provided are achieving their expected outcomes.

The Council reviews its performance regime annually, but this does not specifically cover service user perspective and outcome-based information

- 24 The Council has arrangements in place to formally review the performance regime on an annual basis. It reviewed its Performance Handbook in January 2023. However, the Council did not explore how it can strengthen the information on service user perspective or outcomes as part of this.
- 25 The Council does not compare the type of information it collects or collection methods on service user perspective or outcomes with the information collected by

similar organisations. 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 the information it provides to its senior leaders to enable them to understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.

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 the 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 data 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• 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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