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Auditor General for Wales

Embedding the sustainable development principle into ways of working – **Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust**

Audit year: 2017

Date issued: August 2018

Document reference: 565A2018-19



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The person who delivered the work was Fflur Jones.

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Summary report

Introduction

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) aims to create a Wales that we all want to live in, now and in the future. The Act sets out how 44 specified public bodies must work, and work together, to improve carry out sustainable development, defined as:

‘the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals.’

Public bodies covered by the Act (prescribed bodies) include including national government, local government, local health boards, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and some sponsored bodies. In carrying out sustainable development, they must set well-being objectives and take all reasonable steps to meet them.

- 2 The Act defines the sustainable development principle as;

‘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’.

- 3 To act in this manner, public bodies must take account of the ‘five ways of working’. These are:

- Looking to the long-term so they do not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs;
- Taking an integrated approach so that they look at all the well-being goals in deciding on their well-being objectives;
- Involving a diversity of the population in the decisions that affect them;
- Working with others in a collaborative way to find shared, sustainable solutions; and
- Understanding the root causes of issues to prevent them from occurring or getting worse.¹

In this way, the Act aims to improve what public bodies do and the way they do it so that they can collectively improve the well-being of Wales.

- 4 The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (The Trust) operates as a commissioned service. Its services are commissioned by the seven Welsh Health Boards and the Chief Ambulance Services Commissioner. These form the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee (EASC). The seven Health Boards are prescribed bodies under the Act, the Trust is not.

¹ Welsh Government, **Shared Purpose: Shared Future Statutory Guidance on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, 2016**

- 5 However, the Trust has is committed to working within the spirit of the Act. This includes adopting the sustainable development principle to improve the way it works, including how it can contribute to wider public service and population well-being.
- 6 As part of his programme of local performance audit work at the Trust, the Auditor General for Wales has carried out a review of the Trust's approach to using the sustainable development principle to help shape its business planning and service delivery. The review provides feedback to inform the Trust's future approach. It should be read alongside the Auditor General's wider 'Year One Commentary' on the progress being made by the 44 prescribed bodies in implementing the Act's requirements.
- 7 [Appendix 1](#) provides further information on our audit approach, as well as brief details on the Auditor General's wider Year One Commentary work.

Summary of findings

- 8 The Trust has acknowledged the opportunities and benefits afforded by the Act and the sustainable development principle despite not being required to comply with it. Members of the Executive Team and the wider Board have said that the sustainable development principle provides opportunities for the organisation to work in an integrated way with partners to improve services for the people of Wales.
- 9 The Trust recognises it is at an early stage of framing its approach. During 2017 it has explored how it can apply the sustainable development principle. It has done this in drafting its environmental strategy, its estates strategic outline programme and in how it engages with the broader agenda of Public Service Boards.
- 10 The Trust is yet to apply the sustainable development principle systematically across the way it plans and runs its service. Not being a prescribed body within the Act affords the Trust more time to consider its approach. However, given its commitment to using opportunities provided by the Act, the Trust should maintain momentum 'in taking its plans forward. The Trust has established collaborative objectives around key areas where the Trust wishes to work in partnership to achieve its goals. The Trust has also committed to review its corporate objectives in 2018-19 to take account of the sustainable development principle and the strategic plan for NHS Wales.²
- 11 Capacity constraints are likely to be a potential barrier for the Trust, both in adopting the sustainable development principle internally and in terms of its ability to engage meaningfully with multiple partners, for example those in the Public Service Boards (PSBs). Given its status as a non-prescribed body, the Trust will need to take a pragmatic approach that balances capacity and resource issues

² ['A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care' published in June 2018](#)

with the benefits than can be secured through adoption of the sustainable development principle and associated engagement with partner agencies.

- 12 The commissioning intentions that are issued to the Trust from the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee (EASC) should help shape and inform the Trust's plans. The EASC intends to incorporate sustainable development principles in its commissioning intentions from 2019-20 and the Trust has expressed its commitment to work within these intentions.
- 13 These findings are explored in more detail below.

Recommendations

- 14 The Trust is not required to comply with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Given its stated intention to operate within the spirit of the Act, it may find it helpful to implement the following recommendations.

Exhibit 1: recommendations

Recommendations	
R1	The Trust should be mindful not to simply retrofit its work and planning to the sustainable development principle. It should take reasonable steps to ensure that the sustainable development principle is considered early and throughout its planning processes. The Trust could consider embedding prompts into its internal planning templates to help achieve this.
R2	The Trust should articulate what success in working within the spirit of the Act would mean for the organisation. This could feature within some of the Trust's key corporate documents, for example its Integrated Medium Term Plan (IMTP) and long-term strategy, which could also support the broadening of understanding of the Act amongst staff.
R3	Given capacity limitations, and its status as a non-prescribed body in the Act, the Trust should manage expectations amongst its partners about the extent to which it can meaningfully engage in discussions at the Public Service Board level. This should include clearly communicating the costs and benefits associated with such partnership working.

Detailed report

The Trust has embraced the opportunities provided by the Well-being of Future Generations Act, but it knows it has more to do to embed the sustainable development principle into its ways of working

While not a prescribed body within the Act, the Trust recognises the advantages of integrating the sustainable development principle into its ways of working

- 15 We sought to understand how the Trust perceives the Sustainable Development principle and what it means to staff. We asked 'How would you describe the sustainable development principle and what it means for your organisation?' and to select the following categories that it felt applied:
- A distraction
 - Unnecessary
 - Opportunity
 - Necessity
- 16 In its response, the Trust clearly showed that that it sees the principle as providing an 'opportunity' to help the organisation both 'address some of the major challenges it faces' and 'deliver more sustainable services and better outcomes for citizens'.
- 17 The Trust has articulated a view that service planning in accordance with the sustainable development principle can improve service delivery. The Trust is a smaller body, which works as part of a wider public service system. It sees the sustainable development principle as helping it move beyond its traditional ways of working towards a more innovative and integrated way of delivering services which benefits the user.
- 18 The views of the Trust are similar to those expressed to us by many of the prescribed bodies under the Act³ as part of our evidence gathering for the Auditor General's Year One Commentary. Overall, public bodies described the Act in positive terms with the majority viewing the Act as having the potential to improve 'strategic planning and decision-making' and to 'drive positive change in culture and behaviour'.
- 19 Other health bodies also described how the Act can add value by encouraging a broader view of how to improve the health of the population, including by tackling health inequalities and increasing the focus on preventative work. They saw the

³ The Trust provided this response in relation to the Act, rather than its sustainable development principle specifically.

Act as being important in driving a collective response to these challenges. Similarly, fire and rescue authorities highlighted how the Act provides an opportunity to strengthen collaboration and increase preventative work.

- 20 Some public bodies went further and said that they saw the Act as a 'necessity'. Health bodies, central government and sponsored bodies and fire and rescue authorities were, proportionally, more likely to describe it in this way. This tended to be because they felt the Act could help deliver more sustainable services and better outcomes for citizens.
- 21 The Trust describes the changes it intends to make with regard to the sustainable development principle as 'transformational'. It recognises that it is at an early stage of articulating and embedding its approach. The Trust is committed to using the platform created by the Act to make step changes in the way it delivers services and the way in which it works with partners.
- 22 The Trust knows that it is neither viable nor desirable to carry on providing services in the same way as now given the financial constraints and increasing demand facing all health bodies. The Trust has articulated a commitment to respond to the changing needs of society in a more timely way, with a focus on managing demand, improving health, maintaining independence and optimising the skills of its staff to deliver higher-level care in the community.

The Trust can show examples of sustainable service planning, but it is not yet systematically applying the sustainable development principle

- 23 Within its Integrated Medium Term Plan 2017-20 (IMTP) the Trust stated its twin ambition of being a 'clinically-led and operationally effective service'. It also articulated a commitment to service improvement in line with its vision to become 'a leading ambulance service providing the best possible care.' In the IMTP, the Trust committed to engage with the Act to better develop its strategic responses to predicted population change.
- 24 The Trust has made progress against the plans outlined in its IMTP. For example, the Trust developed collaborative objectives in several key areas where it feels it must work with partners to achieve its goals, these were:
- Estates
 - Training and occupational health
 - Fire and ambulance service relationships
- 25 The Trust has committed to pursuing these objectives over the medium to long-term and hopes that by focussing its activity to working in partnership it will achieve better outcomes. The Trust has also committed to refining its corporate objectives by applying the sustainable development principle as well as by considering the strategic plan for NHS Wales.
- 26 Public bodies prescribed under the Act were required to set their first well-being objectives in 2017. Our Year One Commentary highlights a variable approach to setting objectives by the bodies prescribed under the Act. It also details an observation by the Future Generations Commissioner that 'public bodies are committing to well-being objectives that largely resemble the corporate objectives they would have set before 2017'.
- 27 Other ways in which the Trust has actively made changes in pursuing its aim of working adopting the sustainable development principle include:
- The Trust's Sustainable Development Policy: Drafted in 2017. The policy describes sustainable development as 'one of the guiding principles in the Trust's strategic and operational planning process' and recognises the benefits it can have for its policies and practices; and
 - Board Development Sessions: During 2017, the Trust raised awareness of the Act and the sustainable development principle among Board members and the Executive Team through two Board Development sessions. The Future Generations Commissioner attended one session and members explored the ways in which the Trust can contribute to achieving Wales' seven well-being goals.
- 28 The Trust also highlighted examples of its current work in keeping with the spirit of the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working. While the sustainable development principle has not been explicitly used as a driver for these

examples, they show consideration of some of the five ways of working including integration and prevention. Examples included:

Service Development	Relevance to five ways of working
Optimising of estate by working closely with the fire and rescue authorities, such as the joint Fire and Ambulance Station in Wrexham.	Collaboration, long-term
Full accreditation of the ISO14001:2004 standard Environmental Management System (EMS) in August 2016, which is intended to improve efficiency and reduce waste and energy use and cost.	Long-term, prevention
Achieving the Gold Corporate Health Standard for its commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of its staff in January 2018.	Long-term, prevention
Reducing the demand of frequent callers on the service by working with partner health and blue light organisations and the individuals themselves. This work was recognised through an NHS Wales Award in 2016.	Prevention, collaboration, involvement
Introducing the community paramedic scheme which sees paramedics working closely with primary care providers.	Prevention, collaboration, integration
Falls response teams.	Prevention, collaboration
Placing clinicians in police call rooms to reduce the demand on emergency ambulance services.	Collaboration, integration, prevention

- 29 The Trust's service delivery is governed by the National Collaborative Commissioning: Quality and Delivery Framework Agreement 2015-18 (the Framework) for ambulance services in Wales. The Framework is an agreement between health boards and the Trust on key areas of service provision and sets out details of what is required from the Trust and how the Trust should achieve the requirements.
- 30 The Framework is set within a citizen-centred pathway which describes a five-step model for the delivery of emergency ambulance services within Wales. This model is intended to encourage and enable patients to access services through other, more appropriate means before their needs become urgent and/or life-threatening, and require a response from the emergency ambulance service.
- 31 While the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working are not clearly stated as drivers behind the Framework and the five step model, their focus

on outcomes and patient experience rather than on performance targets is in line with the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working, particularly involvement, integration and prevention.

- 32 While these examples show how the Trust is considering wider opportunities and implications during its service-planning, the Trust should be mindful not to simply retro-fit its work of the to the sustainable development principle.

Despite limited capacity, the Trust and its commissioning body are developing their approaches so that the Trust maximises the Act's opportunities

The Trust is continuing to develop its approach to embedding the sustainable development principle into its ways of working

- 33 The Trust knows its thinking in terms of applying the sustainable development principle to the way it works is at an early stage. Capacity is a significant factor for the Trust both internally and in terms of its partnership working. Given its status as a non-prescribed body, the Trust has not dedicated the same focus and level of resource to making changes to its organisational practices as prescribed members. While this has affected the pace at which the Trust has made changes, staff we spoke to were content that this approach was appropriate and proportionate.
- 34 The Trust is yet to articulate what success in embedding the sustainable development principle will look like. It may find that describing what success in working within the spirit of the Act would mean for the organisation a helpful exercise when shaping its approach.
- 35 As part of our year-one commentary, many prescribed bodies referenced changes they had made to their governance in order to change their ways of working. Many of these related to governance changes such as updating decision or committee report templates and business plan templates or updating documents such as the Constitution, Code of Corporate Governance or Code of Conduct.
- 36 The Trust has recognised that it could use the five ways of working in a more explicit way during service planning. The Trust is exploring options such as making greater use of planning templates to drive thinking and introducing training for staff. Such changes would encourage a shared understanding of the benefits and greater consideration of the sustainable development principle as a more visible driver for service planning and wider decision-making processes.
- 37 During 2018 the Trust has taken steps to ensure that its future direction aligns with the sustainable development principle by including a representative from the Wellbeing of Future Generations Commissioner's Office on the stakeholder panel during the recruitment of its new Chief Executive. The panel sought to test each candidates' appetite, approach and experience in respect of collaboration and partnership. This was done with the aim of ensuring that leadership within the Trust recognises and embraces the opportunities afforded by the sustainable development principle.
- 38 As the Trust's commissioning body, EASC also recognises the role they have to play to ensure the services they commission from the Trust for their respective Health Board areas are in-keeping with the sustainable development principle.
- 39 Each year, EASC issue commissioning intentions to the Trust which they must align to the actions within their Integrated Medium Term Plan and submit to Welsh

Government. The Chief Ambulance Services Commissioner plans for EASC to embed the sustainable development principle within the next set of strategic commissioning intentions for 2019-20. The Trust has stated its commitment to work towards new requirements within the commissioning intentions that relate to the sustainable development principle.

The Trust is continuing to explore opportunities to apply the sustainable development principle more clearly within partnership working

- 40 At the time of fieldwork, the Trust was considering the options available to it in terms of partnership working within the spirit of the sustainable development principle.
- 41 In January 2018, the Trust established an internal Strategic Planning and Partnerships Forum which meets every six weeks. Members of this forum include the Medical Director, Director of Planning and Performance and Director of Quality, Patient Safety and Experience. The forum provides a platform for key staff to discuss partnership working, including opportunities to engage with partners under the Social Services and Well-being Act and the Well-being of Future Generations Act.
- 42 More specifically, in March 2018 the Trust's Executive Team agreed the organisation's approach to engaging with Public Service Boards, in order to engage in strategic discussions about future service delivery. The Trust feels strongly that it can contribute to creative ideas for service design that could help achieve well-being objectives across Wales. However, the capacity of the Trust to engage with each of the Public Service Boards does present a significant challenge.
- 43 The Trust has considered how it could best use its resources in a way that provides value both to the Trust and to Public Service Boards in discharging the well-being duty. It has agreed to pilot participation at four Public Service Boards during 2018, once it has determined which four Public Service Boards present the most opportunity to add value. It aims to evaluate its approach and the benefit and impact achieved during 2019-20.

Appendix 1

Our approach

- 44 For this review, we sought to understand the Trust's views of the sustainable development principle; what key staff think working in the spirit of the Act means for them; and how they are beginning to embed the sustainable development principle.
- 45 Specifically, we considered the following questions:
- To what extent does the Trust perceive the sustainable development principle to be of benefit for the organisation?
 - What key actions has the Trust taken to embed the sustainable development principle within its strategic and operational objectives and the way it works?
 - What is the Trust doing to identify further opportunities to embed the sustainable development principle within the organisation going forward?
 - What is the Trust doing to identify opportunities to work with partners and contribute more broadly to the delivery of the public service well-being duty?
- 46 We adopted a similar approach to our review as was taken for the Wales Audit Office Year One Commentary (below). We asked the Trust to respond to a 'call for evidence' which provided an opportunity for staff to tell us about the work they are doing. We also interviewed a number of Executive Directors, the Chief Ambulance Services Commissioner and reviewed key documents, such as the Integrated Medium Term Plan⁴.

Year One Commentary

- 47 The Auditor General for Wales (the Auditor General) is statutorily required to examine public bodies prescribed by the Act to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when;
- a) setting their well-being objectives; and
 - b) taking steps to meet them.
- 48 In 2017-18, the Auditor General decided to undertake a preliminary piece of work, in advance of commencing his formal examinations. This work is known as the Year One Commentary, which was published in May 2018.⁵
- 49 The Year One Commentary report provides the Auditor General's commentary on how prescribed public bodies have responded to the Act in the first year. It gives some early feedback, without prescribing expectations for how prescribed public bodies should be undertaking their new responsibilities.

⁴ [Integrated Medium Term Plan 2017-20 and 2018-21 iterations](#)

⁵ ['Reflecting on Year One' Wales Audit Office](#)

Appendix 2

The Trust's management response to recommendations

Exhibit 2: management response

The following table sets out the 2018 recommendations and the management response.

Ref	Recommendation	Intended outcome/benefit	High priority (yes/no)	Accepted (yes/no)	Management response	Completion date	Responsible officer
R1	The Trust should be mindful not to simply retrofit its work and planning to the sustainable development principle. It should take reasonable steps to ensure that the sustainable development principle is considered early and throughout its planning processes. The Trust could consider embedding prompts into its internal planning templates to help achieve this.	Ensuring the Trust maximises the benefits of using the sustainable development principle to drive changes in its internal and external planning practices.	Yes	Yes	The Trust will ensure that both the LDP and IMTP development processes include clear opportunities and prompts within its templates and guidance to ensure colleagues are considering the sustainable development principle within their short, medium and longer-term plans.	March 2019	Director of Planning and Performance

Ref	Recommendation	Intended outcome/benefit	High priority (yes/no)	Accepted (yes/no)	Management response	Completion date	Responsible officer
R2	The Trust should articulate what success in working within the spirit of the Act would mean for the organisation. This could feature within some of the Trust's key corporate documents, for example its Integrated Medium-Term Plan (IMTP) and long-term strategy, which could also support the broadening of understanding of the Act amongst staff.	The Trust has identified and articulated what it wants to achieve by working in the spirit of the Act and can therefore take steps to deliver that vision.	Yes	Yes	<p>The Trust will ensure that its long-term strategy is clearly aligned to the key tenets of the WBFGA.</p> <p>The 2019-20 onwards IMTP will clearly articulate the Trust's commitment to the Act, the ways in which any revised plans will reflect the principles of the Act and the tangible outcomes which the Trust anticipates seeing as a result of this approach. This will be echoed in the IMTP summary and any associated staff and stakeholder communication.</p>	March 2019	Director of Partnerships and Engagement

Ref	Recommendation	Intended outcome/benefit	High priority (yes/no)	Accepted (yes/no)	Management response	Completion date	Responsible officer
R3	Given capacity limitations, and its status as a non-prescribed body in the Act, the Trust should manage expectations amongst its partners about the extent to which it can meaningfully engage in discussions at the Public Service Board level. This should include clearly communicating the costs and benefits associated with such partnership working.	The Trust and its partners enabled to maximise the opportunities provided by its involvement at Public Service Boards.	Yes	Yes	The Executive Management Team will reconsider in autumn 2018 the capacity and other limitations of the organisation on its engagement with PSBs. As part of this appraisal process, the Trust will seek the views of a number of key partners (HBs, police, fire and rescue services, local authorities) to inform its position and to ensure that partners are both sighted on the commitment of the organisation to the WBFGA and recognise the need for advocacy on behalf of/consideration of the contribution of WAST to various PSB agenda/activities.	March 2019	Director of Partnerships and Engagement

Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
24 Heol y Gadeirlan
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: post@archwilio.cymru

Gwefan: www.archwilio.cymru