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Auditor General for Wales

Well-being of Future Generations: An examination of taking steps to revise household waste collection, supporting the well-being objective of delivering an attractive and protected environment – **Denbighshire County Council**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Dave Wilson, Jeremy Evans, Gwilym Bury and Bethan Roberts under the direction of Huw Rees.

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The Council understands the potential wider benefits from this Step, but the benefits are not yet well-defined within the operational plans of other council services

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The Council has some well-established collaborations and has identified further opportunities as part of its delivery of this Step. However, it could do more to assess the effectiveness of arrangements that the Council does not directly fund, for example third sector or community-based collaborations

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Summary report

Summary

Why we undertook the Examination

- 1 In accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) the Auditor General for Wales (the Auditor General) is statutorily required to examine public bodies 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.
- 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 The Auditor General must provide a report on his examinations to the National Assembly for Wales at least a year before each Assembly election. The first such report must be published by 2020, before the 2021 Assembly election.
- 4 The Auditor General has undertaken examinations across the 44 bodies covered by the Act to inform his report to the National Assembly during 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- 5 The findings in this report are based on fieldwork that we undertook during the period June 2019 to September 2019.
- 6 This report sets out our findings from our examination of steps the Council is taking to revise household waste collection, a step the Council is taking to meet its Wellbeing Objectives.
- 7 It also sets out the Council’s initial response to our findings.

What we examined

- 8 We examined the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to revise household waste collection, supporting the well-being objective of delivering an attractive and protected environment.
- 9 In order to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle public bodies must take account of the following ‘ways of working’:

Exhibit 1: the 'five ways of working'

The table below sets out the 'five ways of working' as defined in the Welsh Government's **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Essentials**¹ document.

The Five Ways of Working
Long term The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
Prevention How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
Integration Considering how the public body's wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the wellbeing goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
Collaboration Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its wellbeing objectives.
Involvement The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

- 10 Our examination found that the Council has started to apply the sustainable development principle in developing the step and in taking actions to deliver it. However, there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working into its decision making and planning.

¹ Welsh Government, **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Essentials**, 2015.

Detailed report

Part One: Examination Findings

The Council's plans for changes to the waste service are based on a sound understanding of the local and national context and it now needs to ensure that it develops a longer-term waste strategy for the period beyond the roll out of the new service in 2021 that aligns with emerging new strategies from the Welsh Government

What we looked for

- 11 We looked for evidence of:
- a thorough understanding of current and long-term needs and the associated challenges and opportunities;
 - planning over an appropriate timescale;
 - resources allocated to ensure long-term benefits; and
 - appropriate monitoring and review.
- 12 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for the 'long term' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.²

What we found

- 13 We identified the following strengths:
- timing for this service change is based on short/medium term imperatives as follows:
 - positive public opinion around the need for better recycling;
 - financial and economic imperatives to change;
 - the Council's recycling rates are high at 64% but have plateaued and may not meet future Welsh Government targets of 70%;
 - collection arrangements are not following the Welsh Government Blueprint; and
 - good level of Council member awareness and support for the proposed changes.
- 14 We identified the following opportunity:

² See Appendix 1

- the Council could consider a longer-term approach beyond the current roll out in 2021, taking into account long-term trends, demographics and future opportunities such as changes in technology and the impact on the workforce.

The Council is clear about what it is trying to prevent as a result of changes to its waste and recycling arrangements, but it is still developing its plans to embed some of the behaviour changes necessary to support the roll-out of the new model and developing a benefits realisation plan for the new service

What we looked for

- 15 We looked for evidence of:
- thorough understanding of the nature and type of problem the step could help prevent from occurring or getting worse;
 - resources allocated to ensure preventative benefits will be delivered; and
 - monitoring and review of how effectively the step is preventing problems from occurring or getting worse.
- 16 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'prevention' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.³

What we found

- 17 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council is clear about what it is intending to reduce. This includes the amount of residual waste, fuel consumption/emissions of collection vehicles, unnecessary non-recyclable waste packaging by providers and littering caused by seagulls damaging waste sacks; and
 - the Council is also clear about what it is intending to improve. This includes a better understanding around the need for recycling, information about people's recycling waste, support to those who need it and more flexible collection containers to meet individual needs
- 18 We identified the following opportunities:
- the Council has still to develop its approach to actioning some changes:
 - agreement to improve monitoring of waste and recycling habits;
 - encouraging providers to reduce non-recyclable packaging;

³ See Appendix 1

- setting targets for key enablers of the waste changes; and
- monitoring the effectiveness of the waste changes.

The Council understands the potential wider benefits from this Step, but the benefits are not yet well-defined within the operational plans of other council services

What we looked for

- 19 We looked for evidence of consideration of:
- how this step could contribute to the seven national wellbeing goals;
 - how delivery of this step will impact on the Council's wellbeing objectives and wider priorities; and
 - how delivery of this step will impact on other public bodies' wellbeing objectives.
- 20 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'integration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁴

What we found

- 21 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council recognises potential benefits arising from this step:
 - location of the site for the new depot may free up a local land deal;
 - safeguarding of vulnerable people could be improved through the activation and monitoring of microchips on bins to provide alerts;
 - better coordination of changes with other services to improve the local environment such as street cleaning and gully emptying;
 - the Council is aware of the need to address the potential negative impact of these changes such as fly tipping and lower costs for businesses by not recycling; and
 - the Council is working with Welsh Water to examine the potential to convert surplus waste bins into water butts.
- 22 We identified the following opportunities:
- clarity about the potential benefits of more integrated working between Council services and other bodies, for example other councils; and
 - inclusion of the Step and wider benefits within service plans of other council services and other public bodies, for example social services and housing.

⁴ See Appendix 1

The Council has some well-established collaborations and has identified further opportunities as part of its delivery of this Step. However, it could do more to assess the effectiveness of arrangements that the Council does not directly fund, for example third sector or community-based collaborations

What we looked for

- 23 We looked for evidence that the Council:
- has considered how it could work with others to deliver the step (to meet its wellbeing objectives, or assist another body to meet its wellbeing objectives);
 - is collaborating effectively to deliver the step; and
 - is monitoring and reviewing whether the collaboration is helping it or its stakeholders meet wellbeing objectives.
- 24 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'collaboration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁵

What we found

- 25 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council currently collaborates and works effectively with:
 - WRAP
 - third sector
 - other north Wales councils
- 26 We identified the following opportunities:
- the Council has identified opportunities for further collaboration over:
 - making waste and recycling part of the licence/agreement making expectations of and responsibilities of tenants clear;
 - increased recycling of textiles through the third sector; and
 - finalisation of the North Wales enforcement approach for those who recycle incorrectly.
 - the Council could review how collaborative arrangements with the third sector and community groups are effective and whether collaborations are planned strategically or are seen as stand-alone arrangements within the waste service.

⁵ See Appendix 1

The Council has involved local residents about the changes to waste services however, it recognises the need for more coordinated and targeted engagement prior to the service changes

What we looked for

- 27 We looked for evidence that the Council has:
- identified who it needs to involve in designing and delivering the step;
 - effectively involved key stakeholders in designing and delivering the step;
 - used the results of involvement to shape the development and delivery of the step; and
 - sought to learn lessons and improve its approach to involvement.
- 28 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'collaboration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁶

What we found

- 29 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council has engaged with residents over the planned changes to waste collection and recycling as follows:
 - a total of 2,000 questionnaire responses were received through the Council's online survey, in a county that has 45,000 properties;
 - events have been held in various venues to explain the need for behaviour changes;
 - work in schools to help educate children and their parents – particularly proud of the public's acceptance of the Biogen plant at St Asaph; and
 - various initiatives to get the message across about recycling such as food waste champions, videos and tweets.
- 30 We identified the following opportunities:
- the Council recognises the need to undertake further engagement such as:
 - the Project Interdependences matrix sets out the need for extra staff to deal with higher numbers of calls during implementation;
 - engagement events to support delivery of this project;
 - work with schools to help educate children and their parents and promote/encourage behaviour change;

⁶ See Appendix 1

- opportunities for schools and other groups to visit recycling centres – but the visitor facilities are not yet set up for the regional energy to waste plant;
- the Council could learn from its recent low survey response rate – did it target the right groups, was the approach right and was the response suitably representative;
- more roadshows and consultation on the detail of the waste and recycling changes such as colour of bins etc. and a big drive on food waste;
- the Communication Plan, last updated in December 2018, describes a range of communication approaches but it does not always identify the target of the communication; and
- a local family is involved in encouraging others to recycle more – could the Council do more?

Part Two: Council's response

31 Following the conclusion of our fieldwork we presented our findings to the Council at a workshop in September 2019 that was attended by officers from the Highways and Environment Service Strategic Planning Team and Corporate Communications and Marketing Service. At this workshop the Council began to consider its response to our findings and as a result of discussions at the workshop and further reflection on our findings the Council has developed the following actions.

32 Long Term

Theme: Developing long term Strategy in terms of Waste, Communications and Engagement, as well as developing a benefits realisation plan.

Specific actions:

- develop a wider waste strategy and delivery plan that covers the whole waste service, and links to the Welsh Government strategy;
- develop a long-term communications strategy beyond 2021; and
- develop a Benefits Realisation Plan that is tracked during and beyond project implementation.

33 Prevention

Theme: Promote culture change, and optimising collaboration.

Understanding the impact of change in services by establishing baselines and measures for service performance.

Specific actions:

- back office re-structure to compliment the service change to moving to area-based working to optimise collaboration and engagement;
- measure baseline service standards so it is understood how the changes impact on this; and
- wider adoption of use of social norming to community led instruction and messages and nudges, embedded in our behaviour change strategy.

34 Integration

Theme: Ensuring actions are incorporated in business planning across services.

Specific actions:

- ensure actions feature in relevant service operational plans (shared actions); and
- Waste and Recycling Service to work with other Council Services to identify and deliver additional benefits to Denbighshire Citizens, employees and the council as a result of the changes to the Waste Collection model and to ensure that projects are captured and monitored through the Council's business planning process where appropriate (linked to the Benefits Realisation Plan).

35 Collaboration

Theme: Formalise arrangements with communities and third sector organisations to delivery services.

Specific actions:

- ensure any future formal arrangements with third sector organisations and community groups are recognised through an agreed SLA.

36 Involvement

Theme: Develop a communication strategy with a focus on a targeted approach, that educates and shares information at the appropriate time.

Specific actions:

- more targeted communication with identified groups and mechanisms/channels that will be used and measured, with a view to informing future communication activities;
- consider developing community champions, particularly in areas such as West Rhyl, where community engagement and participation is often challenging;

- hard to reach/challenging properties and locations – gain an insight through focus group to help design and deliver services;
- implement engagement plan once the timing is right to do so;
- use ‘engagement portal’ to involve/promote service change;
- create accessible opportunities in town centres and other areas of high footfall to engage with local residents to promote pro-recycling behaviour changes and future service changes;
- through the Eco-schools’ programme (Keep Wales Tidy) develop cascade learning approaches to ensure accurate messages and instructions to reach our households;
- use of internet and social media tools eg PlayBuzz to clarify what can and can’t be recycled – using schools to help promote site;
- involve teachers through paid supply/relief cover, to develop educational material that reinforce recycling messages to DCC; and
- continue to celebrate work of schools and local groups and encourage best practice sharing between them through annual awards.

37 We will continue to monitor the Council’s progress in implementing these actions, and the extent to which they address the issues we have identified in our findings.

Appendix 1

Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

Exhibit 1: Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

The table below sets out 'positive indicators' for each of the five ways of working that we have identified. We have not used the indicators as a checklist. They should be viewed as indicators. They helped us to form conclusions about the extent to which a body is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its Wellbeing Objectives.

What would show a body is fully applying the long-term way of working?

- There is a clear understanding of what 'long term' means in the context of the Act.
- They have designed the step to deliver the well-being objective/s and contribute to their long-term vision.
- They have designed the step to deliver short or medium-term benefits, which are balanced with the impact over the long term (within the project context).
- They have designed the step based on a sophisticated understanding of current and future need and pressures, including analysis of future trends.
- Consequently, there is a comprehensive understanding of current and future risks and opportunities.
- Resources have been allocated to ensure long-term as well as short-term benefits are delivered.
- There is a focus on delivering outcomes, with milestones/progression steps identified where outcomes will be delivered over the long term.
- They are open to new ways of doing things which could help deliver benefits over the longer term.
- They value intelligence and pursue evidence-based approaches.

What would show a body is fully applying the preventative way of working?

- The body seeks to understand the root causes of problems so that negative cycles and intergenerational challenges can be tackled.
- The body sees challenges from a system-wide perspective, recognising and valuing the long-term benefits that they can deliver for people and places.
- The body allocates resources to preventative action that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and use of resources over the longer term, even where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs.
- There are decision-making and accountability arrangements that recognise the value of preventative action and accept short-term reductions in performance and resources in the pursuit of anticipated improvements in outcomes and use of resources.

What would show a body is taking an 'integrated' approach?

- Individuals at all levels understand their contribution to the delivery of the vision and wellbeing objectives.
- Individuals at all levels understand what different parts of the organisation do and proactively seek opportunities to work across organisational boundaries. This is replicated in their work with other public bodies.
- Individuals at all levels recognise the cross-organisation dependencies of achieving the ambition and objectives.
- There is an open culture where information is shared.
- There is a well-developed understanding of how the wellbeing objectives and steps to meet them impact on other public sector bodies.
- Individuals proactively work across organisational boundaries to maximise their contribution across the wellbeing goals and minimise negative impacts.
- Governance, structures and processes support this, as do behaviours.

What would show a body is collaborating effectively?

- The body is focused on place, community and outcomes rather than organisational boundaries.
- The body has a good understanding of partners' objectives and their responsibilities, which helps to drive collaborative activity.
- The body has positive and mature relationships with stakeholders, where information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- The body recognises and values the contributions that all partners can make.
- The body seeks to establish shared processes and ways of working, where appropriate.

What would show a body is involving people effectively?

- Having an understanding of who needs to be involved and why.
- Reflecting on how well the needs and challenges facing those people are currently understood.
- Working co-productively, working with stakeholders to design and deliver.
- Seeing the views of stakeholders as a vital sources of information that will help deliver better outcomes.
- Ensuring that the full diversity of stakeholders is represented and they are able to take part.
- Having mature and trusting relationships with its stakeholders where there is ongoing dialogue and information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- Ensure stakeholders understand the impact of their contribution.
- Seek feedback from key stakeholders which is used to help learn and improve.

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