

# Use of performance information: Service User perspective and Outcomes – Caerphilly County Borough Council

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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 **the Council provides limited performance information to enable senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users and the outcomes of its activities and thus, effectively manage its performance.**
- 3 We have made three recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.
- 4 Our findings are based on fieldwork we did between May and June 2023.

## What we looked at – the scope of this audit

- 5 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.
- 6 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.
- 7 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.
- 8 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.
- 9 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.

- 10 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

- 11 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.
- 12 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

- 13 The Council produces annual self-assessment reports, which include details of service performance and progress towards the Council's well-being objectives.
- 14 The Council provides a Corporate Self-Assessment (CPA) and Directorate Performance Assessments (DPA) to Cabinet, Governance and Audit Committee, as well as Scrutiny Committees every six months. The Education Directorate also produces Monitoring and Evaluation Reports.
- 15 Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

## What we found

### **The Council provides limited performance information to enable senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users and the outcomes of its activities, and thus effectively manage its performance**

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

- 16 Overall, we found the performance information provided to senior leaders, in Corporate and Directorate Performance Assessments, and the Council's self-assessment report, does not enable senior leadership to have a comprehensive understanding of the service user perspective.
- 17 We found some examples of information which would help senior leaders understand the perspective of service users, such as the tenant satisfaction surveys and information within the Monitoring Evaluation Reports used in the Education Directorate. The Directorate Performance Assessments also include a section to record customer information. This is mainly complaints and compliments and some services have acknowledged this doesn't necessarily provide a representative reflection of the perspective of service users.
- 18 However, where examples were found within some areas, this was not the case across all services and reports. It is, therefore, difficult to see how senior leaders would be able to fully understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users from the information they are given.

#### **Performance information provided to senior leaders mostly focuses on outputs and activities rather than evaluating impact**

- 19 There is information within the Education Monitoring and Evaluation reports which would help senior leaders understand the impact of its services. But largely, we found that the performance data and quarterly performance assessments that are publicly reported by the Council, contain limited information on outcomes. Most of the information focuses on outputs and activities.
- 20 For example, the Council's Directorate Performance Assessments include sections for directorates to record their progress in achieving outcomes. But directorates generally provide information about activities and outputs in this section, rather than evaluating the outcomes of those activities. This makes it difficult for senior leaders to understand the impact of the Council's activities and if it is meeting its objectives.

### **The Council has limited arrangements to ensure that the performance data reflecting the service user perspective and outcomes information is accurate**

- 21 The Council has limited arrangements to check the accuracy and quality of data and performance information relating to the service user perspective and outcomes. As set out earlier in our report, such information is limited in the Council's performance reports anyway.
- 22 The Council trusts its staff to be familiar with the data it uses. The performance team 'sense-checks' performance information, focusing on anomalies from anticipated levels of performance. The Council provided examples where the performance team's checks had helped identify and address inaccuracies in data. However, the Council does not have arrangements in place to routinely check the accuracy of its performance information. As a result, there is a risk of actions being taken and resources deployed based on inaccurate information.

### **As the 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**

- 23 The Council provides limited performance information to its senior leaders. This information is to enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of its activities. However, it is logical that, with this information being limited, the extent to which the Council uses the service user perspective and outcomes information, to help it achieve its outcomes, will also be limited.
- 24 Where we did find examples of the Council providing information on the perspective of service users and outcomes, we found some examples of the Council then using this information to make changes. For example, following its evaluation of the Youth Development Forum, the Council has identified actions to improve engagement with youth groups and the communication of outcomes.

### **The Council's reviews of its performance information arrangements have not focused on improving information to help senior leaders better understand the service user perspective and outcomes**

- 25 In July 2020, as part of its response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Council commissioned a review of information, insight, and intelligence. This review was intended to help the Council understand and improve its use of data. The Council also introduced Directorate Performance Assessments (DPA), designed to use information to help understand what the Council does well and what it can do better. However, our review has found that the information review and the DPAs have not resulted in the Council strengthening the information it provides to senior leaders to help them understand the service user perspective and outcomes of its activities.

- 26 The Council does not compare the type of information it collects, or its 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

R1 Information on the perspective of the service user

- The Council should strengthen the information it provides to senior leaders to enable them to understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.

R2 Information on progress towards outcomes

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

R3 Quality and accuracy of data

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

# 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 <sup>1</sup> (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"><li>• The information is:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– relevant to the objectives the Council has set itself;</li><li>– sufficient to enable an understanding of the service user perspective;</li><li>– sufficient to provide an understanding of progress towards the outcomes the Council is planning to achieve;</li><li>– drawn from the diversity of service users including groups who share protected characteristics; and</li><li>– used to inform comparisons with the performance of similar bodies where relevant.</li></ul></li><li>• The Council has involved service users in determining which information to collect.</li></ul>
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"><li>• The information draws on a range of evidence sources to provide a holistic view of progress.</li><li>• The information enables senior leaders to monitor progress over the short, medium and long term.</li><li>• The information enables senior leaders to monitor the delivery of outcomes that cover multiple service areas and/or organisations.</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> 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 Criteria<sup>1</sup> (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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