

Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – City and County of Swansea

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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 performance information provided to senior leaders to enable them to understand the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities is limited.
- 3 We have made three recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.
- 4 Our findings are based on fieldwork we did between March and August 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 perspectives 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 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 officers 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 key performance reporting arrangements

- 13 Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees receive quarterly performance reports that include details of service performance and progress towards the Council’s well-being objectives.
- 14 Individual service areas report progress against key measures and indicators to Corporate Management Team. For example, Child and Family services provide a monthly wellbeing report.
- 15 The Council published its Annual Self-Assessment in March 2023. Prior to this, the Governance and Audit Committee considered it in December 2022, in line with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 16 Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

What we found

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

Performance information provided to senior leaders on the perspective of service users is limited, so it is difficult to see how they can fully understand the perspective of service users to manage performance

- 17 The Council's public performance reports generally do not include information on the perspective of service users, apart from a few limited examples. 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 its performance information.
- 18 At a service level, particularly in social services, information is collected on the service user experience, but this is not the case across all services and this information is not always reported to senior leaders.

Performance information provided to senior leaders largely focuses on outputs and activities rather than evaluating their impact on service users or the outcomes the Council is trying to achieve

- 19 The performance information the Council reports publicly and the information reported to Corporate Management Team contains some information about outcomes, but much of it is focused upon outputs and quantitative measures. This limits senior leaders' ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities and whether it is meeting its objectives.
- 20 In its annual self-evaluation, the Council has included case studies to help provide a more holistic view of its performance. For example, there are case studies to help illustrate the impact of providing direct payments to individuals, and support and services for individual carers. These case studies help senior leaders understand the impact of the Council's activities, although the small number means they do not provide a comprehensive picture of performance. Further case studies across all of the objectives could be a positive development.

The Council is re-introducing arrangements to check the quality of its performance data but this does not yet include data on outcomes and the service user perspective

- 21 The Council stopped checking its performance indicator data during the Covid-19 pandemic which increased the risks of action being taken and resources deployed on the basis of inaccurate information. The Council's Internal Audit service reviewed the effectiveness of the Council's arrangements to collect and publish performance management data during 2021-22. Internal Audit recommended that the Council should re-instate sample checking of performance indicator data. The Council has now restarted checking its performance indicator data for Social Services and intends to extend its checking arrangements to all its performance indicators in April 2024.
- 22 The Council has a process in place to determine which performance indicators it will collect. As part of this, services propose indicators, including how they will be defined, collected and their relevance to the service plan, corporate plan, or risk register. The process provides a mechanism to review and challenge the robustness of the accuracy of the data. The Council used this process to develop performance indicators for its new Corporate Plan. At the time of the review we found that the Council has limited outcomes and service user perspective information, so this process hasn't covered this type of information. The Council could use this process to help it assess the accuracy of service user perspective and outcomes information in future.

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

- 23 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 logically 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.
- 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. For example, the Council collects information on complaints it receives and monitors the outcomes of those complaints.

The Council recognises the need to improve how it assesses the outcomes of its activities and has just started this process

- 25 The Council has identified in its annual self-assessment that it needs to analyse the outcomes of its activities . It is planning to review its overall performance management arrangements during 2023-24.
- 26 The Council has begun working with its Public Service Board (PSB) partner organisations to develop a PSB Performance Management Framework. This work includes assessing performance indicator data available from other agencies and aligning them to the Swansea PSB Wellbeing Plan. It is too early for us to assess the impact of this work.
- 27 It will be important for the Council to ensure that it benchmarks and compares its arrangements for collecting and reporting performance information on outcomes and the service user perspective with the approaches of other organisations. This is an important element of arrangements to secure value for money. Doing this will also help the Council understand and learn from how other councils are providing information on service user perspective and outcomes.

Recommendations

Exhibit 1: recommendations

R1 Information on the perspective of the service user:

- 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.

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 its intended 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– used to inform comparisons with the performance of similar bodies where relevant.• 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 principal 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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