

Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – Vale of Glamorgan 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's performance information provides senior leaders with a limited understanding of the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities.
- 3 Our findings are based upon fieldwork we did between March and August 2023.
- 4 We have made two recommendations to strengthen the information given to senior leaders.

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 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 performance reporting arrangements

- 13 The Council’s Cabinet receives performance reports every three months. These reports include details of service performance and progress towards the Council’s well-being objectives.
- 14 The Council’s Strategic Leadership Team receives quarterly performance reports. These include details of service performance and progress towards well-being objectives.
- 15 The Council published its Annual Self-Assessment 2021-22 in November 2022. Prior to this, the Governance and Audit Committee considered it in October 2022, in keeping 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

The Council's performance information provides senior leaders with a limited understanding of the service user perspective and the outcomes of the Council's activities.

The performance information provided to senior leaders provides them with some insight into the perspective of service users, but this is not consistent across all services.

- 17 Every quarter, the Council reports a large volume of performance information to its Strategic Leadership Team , Scrutiny Committees and Cabinet.
- 18 We found a small number of examples of information, such as customer satisfaction measures, which would help senior leaders understand the views of service users. As part of its annual self-assessment, the Council surveyed its citizens, which included questions about satisfaction with Council services. The Council incorporated the findings from the survey into its annual self-assessment report, thus helping senior leaders to understand the perspective of service users. However, the Council acknowledges in its self-assessment report that response rates to the survey were low and did not necessarily reflect the full diversity of the population.
- 19 Overall, we found that information to help senior leaders understand the views of service users is limited and not consistently provided across all services. This means that senior leaders are not always able to use the perspective of service users to inform their decisions or monitoring of service performance.

The performance information provided to senior leaders does not enable them to have a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of the Council's actions.

- 20 The majority of the performance measures and indicators reported to senior leaders are output focused, although there are also examples of measures that allow senior leaders to understand the outcome or impact that the Council's actions have had. However, within the Council's performance reports, not all wellbeing objectives are supported by outcome focused performance measures. This limits senior leaders' ability to understand the impact of the Council's activities and whether it is meeting its objectives.

The Council has arrangements in place to ensure that its performance information is accurate

- 21 The Council 's performance management framework incorporates arrangements to check the quality and accuracy of data, and to support colleagues where weaknesses in data quality are identified. For example, the Council provides written guidance on performance reporting to officers responsible for providing the performance information, as well as written guidance on setting targets and a performance indicator definition library.
- 22 Officers responsible for providing performance information are supported by a range of templates and documents that ensure a consistent approach to collecting, checking and reporting data across the Council.
- 23 In April 2022, as part of its review of the Council's performance management arrangements, Internal Audit reviewed the accuracy of the information collected and reported for public accountability measures (PAMs). Internal Audit gave an opinion of reasonable assurance and made a recommendation that officers updating the performance information should be reminded to save and retain source evidence, so accuracy can be checked. The Council agreed that it would do this. These arrangements help give senior leaders assurance that there is rigour behind the performance information they receive.
- 24 The Council, therefore, has processes in place to give itself assurance that senior leaders' decisions are based on robust performance 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

- 25 As set out above, our main finding is that performance information provided to senior leaders provides a limited understanding of 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 also limited.
- 26 We did find a small number of examples of the Council providing information on the perspective of service users and outcomes. In those instances, there was evidence of the Council's scrutiny committees responding to poor performance information and engaging with those issues in more depth. For example, there has been scrutiny of the performance of the customer contact centre and sickness absence data.

The Council has identified that it needs to engage more with service users, but hasn't determined how this will shape the information provided to senior leaders to ensure it is appropriate and relevant

- 27 The Council's Corporate sets out the Council's intent to increase the level of engagement with service users. This in turn aims to increase the amount of information the Council has about the service user perspective. However, the Council has not explored how it will use that information to help senior leaders better understand the perspective of service users.
- 28 The Council does not routinely compare its arrangements for collecting and reporting performance information on outcomes and the service user perspective with the approaches of other organisations. Doing this will help the Council understand and learn from how other councils are providing information on service user perspective and outcomes. 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 its senior leaders to enable them to understand how well services and policies are meeting the needs of service users.

- R2 Outcomes information
- The Council should strengthen the information provided to senior leaders to help them evaluate whether the Council is delivering its objectives and 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 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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