

Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes – City of Cardiff Council

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Report summary

- 1 We considered the service user perspective and outcome information provided to senior officers and senior elected members (senior leaders), and how this information is used.
- 2 Overall, we found that the Council's performance information does not consistently enable senior leaders to have a full understanding of the service user perspective, but provides information to help senior leaders understand the outcomes of the Council's activities.
- 3 We have made one recommendation to strengthen the performance information given to senior leaders.
- 4 Our findings are based upon fieldwork we did during May 2023.

What we looked at – the scope of this audit

- 5 We focused on the performance information provided to senior officers and senior elected 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 has various methods of sharing its performance information with senior leaders.
- 14 All performance information relating to the Corporate Plan is updated and added to the Corporate Plan dashboard every three months. The Council’s elected members can access the Corporate Plan dashboard at any time. The Corporate Plan dashboard contains a large amount of information for the Council’s performance management, reporting and monitoring needs. It enables the reader to filter upon various types of performance information or subject of interest.
- 15 The Council’s Cabinet receives reports on the Council’s half-year and end of year self-assessment. The reports include information on surveys, citizen feedback and complaints as well as a link to the Corporate Plan dashboard.

- 16 Scrutiny committees also consider the mid-year self-assessment as part of the process of refreshing the Corporate Plan. The Council also has a Performance Panel, which is a sub-committee of the Policy Review and Performance Scrutiny Committee. It meets three times a year to consider the draft corporate plan (in January and February), the Annual Wellbeing report (in June and July) and the Mid-year Performance Assessment (in December). The Panel receives some performance information as part of that process.
- 17 In January and February of each year, the Council convenes thematic challenge sessions, which are attended by the relevant senior officers and Cabinet Members. The purpose of these sessions is to consider progress against each of the Council's Wellbeing Objectives, to assess performance against key indicators and set targets for the financial year ahead.
- 18 In October 2022, the Council published its Annual Wellbeing Report 2021/22, which incorporates its self-assessment as required by the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.
- 19 Twice a year, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and the Community and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee receive performance reports on a range of performance indicators in their service area. This is not the case for other scrutiny committees.
- 20 Our review focused on these key performance reporting mechanisms.

What we found

The Council's performance information does not consistently enable senior leaders to have a full understanding of the service user perspective, but provides information to help senior leaders understand the outcomes of the Council's activities

The performance information provided to senior leaders to help them understand the perspective of service users does not consistently cover all service areas

- 21 Overall, we found some examples of performance information provided to senior leaders to help them understand the perspective or experience of service users. These include performance measures relating to the customer contact centre, some social services indicators and some information from the Council's annual 'Ask Cardiff' survey. However, the information that senior leaders receive does not consistently cover all service areas of the Council.
- 22 The Council's Annual Wellbeing Report 2021/22 references the consultation and engagement activity that the Council has undertaken throughout the year. But it's

not clear how the Council has used the results of that activity to inform its self-assessment, or to enable senior leaders to understand the service user perspective.

- 23 Therefore, overall, it can be difficult for senior leaders to understand the citizen perception of all Council services and polices.

The performance reports to senior leaders provide a balance of output and outcome focused information, although the large volume of information can make it challenging to navigate

- 24 The performance information provided to senior leaders includes a balance of output and outcome focused information. This can help senior leaders understand the outcomes of its activities.
- 25 However, within the large volume of information contained in the Corporate Dashboard, it can be challenging to understand how individual outcome measures link to the Council's strategic priorities and objectives. This in turn means it can be challenging for senior leaders to assess the Council's progress towards its objectives and understand the impact of individual measures.

The Council has effective arrangements in place to ensure the accuracy of the performance information it provides to senior leaders regarding the service user perspective and outcomes

- 26 The Council has arrangements in place to assure itself about the accuracy of its performance information.
- 27 Officers within services, centrally located Performance and Insight officers, and Directors all have responsibilities to verify the data prior to publication. The Council provided us with documents to substantiate this process. It was also able to provide examples of occasions where they had identified concerns with the accuracy of the data being collected and had worked to address that. For example, the Council commissioned an independent review into the data in a service where there additional assurance was required on data accuracy.

The Council uses its performance information to help it achieve its intended outcomes

- 28 We have already set out that the information the Council collects on the service user perspective does not consistently cover all service areas. However, where the Council does have information on the perspective of service users and outcomes, we found examples of the Council then using this information to make changes. This included an example where the Council had observed a decline in satisfaction data, relating to an increase in antisocial behaviour in the Cowbridge Road area. The Council acted to address this and saw a subsequent improvement in satisfaction rates.

The Council is planning to review the effectiveness of its own arrangements but does not routinely seek to learn from other organisations about gathering the service user perspective

- 29 The Council acknowledges that it could do more to strengthen the link between the information on the service user perspective it collects at a service level and the performance information it regularly reports to its senior leaders. The Council has developed a plan to review its citizen satisfaction data to strengthen the connection between service and corporate level reporting.
- 30 The Council does not compare the type of information it collects or 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.

Recommendation

Exhibit 1: recommendation

- 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.

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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