

Setting of well-being objectives – National Library of Wales

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Contents

Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives	4
Carrying out our examination at the Library	5
How and when the Library set its well-being objectives	5
What we found: The Library showed clear commitment to applying the sustainable development principle and put its well-being objectives at the heart of its strategic planning, but there was scope to improve its consideration of future trends, other organisations' objectives, and involving the full diversity of the population	7
Recommendations	12
Appendix 1: Key questions and what we looked for	13

Background: Our examinations of the setting of well-being objectives

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a ‘well-being duty’ on 48 public bodies. The duty requires those bodies to set and publish ‘well-being objectives’ that are designed to maximise their contribution to achieving each of the Act’s seven national well-being goals.¹ They must also take all reasonable steps, in exercising their functions, to meet those objectives.
- 2 The Auditor General must carry out examinations to assess the extent to which public bodies have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives.² We are carrying out a rolling programme of these examinations, up to early 2025.³
- 3 To do something in accordance with the sustainable development principle means 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’. To achieve this, a public body must take account of the five ways of working: long term, integration, involvement, collaboration, and prevention.⁴
- 4 We designed an assessment framework to enable us to assess the extent to which public bodies have applied the sustainable development principle when setting their well-being objectives. **Appendix 1** sets out further information on our approach, including a set of ‘positive indicators’ that illustrate what good could look like.
- 5 In designing our approach, we considered what we could reasonably expect from public bodies at this point in time. Public bodies should now be familiar with the sustainable development principle and ways of working and be seeking to apply them in a meaningful way. At the same time, we appreciate that public bodies are still developing their experience in applying the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives. Therefore, the examinations include consideration of how public bodies are applying their learning and how they can improve in future.

¹ The seven national well-being goals are a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales.

² Section 15 (1) (a) Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

³ The Auditor General must carry out examinations over the period set out in the Act, which begins one year before a Senedd election and ends one year and one day before the following Senedd election.

⁴ Section 5 Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Carrying out our examination at the Library

- 6 The aim of this examination was to:
 - provide assurance on the extent that the National Library of Wales (the Library) applied the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives; and
 - identify opportunities for the Library to further embed the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives in future.
- 7 We set out to answer the overall question ‘to what extent has the Library acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives’. We did this by exploring the following questions:
 - Was the process the Library put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?
 - Has the Library considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?
 - Has the Library put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?
- 8 We discussed the timing, documents, and key individuals we should speak to with the Library.
- 9 We gathered our evidence by:
 - reviewing key documents;
 - running a workshop with key people who were involved with setting the well-being objectives; and
 - speaking to the key contact for the Library at the Future Generations Commissioner’s Office.

How and when the Library set its well-being objectives

- 10 The Library started work on setting new well-being objectives during 2020. It then published what it describes as its ‘strategic and well-objectives’ in April 2021 in ‘A Library for Wales and the World: Strategic Plan 2021-26’. **Exhibit 1** sets out the well-being objectives and further ‘operational objectives’ to support them.
- 11 The Library also published a well-being statement, as required by the Act. The strategic plan and well-being statement are on the Library’s [website](#).
- 12 Section 7 of the Act sets out the requirement to publish a well-being statement and what it must cover. The Library’s statement does not fully cover each of the required elements, specifically those relating to how it considers it has set well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle, how it proposes to govern itself, how it will keep the steps under review and how it

proposes to ensure that resources are allocated annually for the purpose of taking such steps. The scope of this examination does not extend to a detailed audit of the statement. However, we have made a recommendation to inform the development of a future statement.

Exhibit 1: The Library's well-being objectives and supporting operational objectives, as set out in the Strategic Plan 2021-26

1. Cultivate and care for the nation's memory
 - 1.1 Capturing contemporary Wales
 - 1.2 Committed to diversity
 - 1.3 Leading in preservation and management of information

2. Lay the foundation for a knowledge economy
 - 2.1 Knowledge that invigorates and inspires
 - 2.2 Creating opportunities to participate
 - 2.3 Improving the user experience

3. Be at the heart of national life
 - 3.1 Connecting with communities
 - 3.2 Sharing collections
 - 3.3 Promoting global Wales

4. Empower learning and research
 - 4.1 Enabling research and Innovation
 - 4.2 Supporting formal learning
 - 4.3 Promoting informal learning

What we found

The Library showed clear commitment to applying the sustainable development principle and put its well-being objectives at the heart of its strategic planning, but there was scope to improve its consideration of future trends, other organisations' objectives, and involving the full diversity of the population

The process for setting the well-being objectives

Planning process

- 13 In setting its new well-being objectives, the Library set out to improve on how it set its first well-being objectives in 2017. It was also keen to respond to findings from the Welsh Government commissioned '[Tailored Review](#)' (March 2020), and sought advice and feedback from the Future Generations Commissioner. Senior leaders we spoke to as part of our examination expressed commitment to applying the sustainable development principle and delivering on the Library's responsibilities under the Act.
- 14 One significant shift was the decision to put the well-being objectives at the heart of the Strategic Plan. Doing so helps ensure the Library is well-placed to maximise its contribution across the well-being goals. This represents a change in the Library's understanding of how best to deliver its duties under the Act and reflects statutory guidance. It also reflects a Tailored Review recommendation. The Library's previous well-being objectives were a sub-set of its corporate objectives, and it identified them retrospectively.

Evidence base

- 15 In setting its new well-being objectives, the Library considered risks and opportunities. It drew on the following main evidence sources:
 - Its own information on performance against previous corporate objectives and key performance indicators.
 - The Tailored Review, which assessed the Library's performance and considered how it should prepare for challenges it faces over the following ten years.
 - Internal engagement with the Board, Executive Team and Delivery Group (Heads of Department), and workshops with staff.
 - An external consultation exercise to develop the strategic plan.

- 16 The Library drew on its assessment of performance against its previous corporate objectives to help identify priorities for future action. The Library's 2019-20 annual report provided a high-level description of how activity to deliver the previous corporate objectives had contributed to the national well-being goals. It did not include performance measures or an evaluation of progress. However, the Library separately produces more detailed monitoring information, including reporting to the Welsh Government as part of sponsorship arrangements.
- 17 The Tailored Review provided a timely and broad analysis of the Library's performance and some key medium- and longer-term challenges. It made 34 recommendations, including areas for improvement relevant to the application of the sustainable development principle. Challenges related to financial sustainability and the need to maintain the Library's infrastructure, while also extending its reach through digital services. These issues are visible in the well-being objectives and Strategic Plan.
- 18 The Strategic Plan also sets out several factors that will continue to impact on the Library's work. They relate to policy changes, financial challenges, longstanding problems relating to equality and social mobility, the impact of the pandemic and digitisation. The Strategy notes that the Library will need to consider these issues if it is to deliver its well-being objectives and vision. The Library could strengthen its approach to setting its objectives by giving further consideration to the longer-term risks and opportunities associated with these challenges. This could include drawing on the Future Trends report or other relevant trend information, such as changes in technological advancements, and exploring the potential impact on its future.
- 19 Nevertheless, one of the Library's core functions is to 'preserve', which is described as ensuring 'that the knowledge entrusted to our care continues to be available for future generations'. This has been translated into well-being objectives that are aimed at achieving long-term benefits.

Consultation and involvement

- 20 The Tailored Review also identified that the Library could do more to understand audience requirements and that, in recent years, it had not directly engaged the public on any of its future plans.
- 21 The Library took a different approach when setting its new well-being objectives, launching a public consultation in May 2020 on its vision for the future. The consultation sought views from groups the Library has not previously involved, some of which reflect gaps identified through the Tailored Review. It highlighted to us its engagement with the Future Generations Leadership Academy, facilitated by the Future Generations Commissioner's office, as a notable example of engaging with new voices who provided a perspective that the Library had not heard before.
- 22 The Library targeted groups that represented both potential and current users. However, the consultation was carried out during the height of the pandemic and was therefore not as extensive as it might otherwise have been. It prepared a

consultation document and video and ensured people could engage online or in person. This included five external workshops and 81 written responses, covering stakeholder organisations and members of the public.

- 23 The Library sought a cross-section of views in the consultation. This included coverage across several protected characteristics (as defined under the Equality Act 2010). However, the Library could have gone much further to ensure fuller representation. For example, it did not involve specific groups representing disabled people, ethnic minorities, or LGBTQ+ people. The Library is retrospectively identifying stakeholders that it did not include in the consultation but could help it have a wider impact across the well-being goals. It has indicated to us that it intends to engage more stakeholders when next setting well-being objectives.
- 24 The Library also told us that the pandemic increased its awareness of the need to understand its audiences. It noted that this became the basis for discussion about the core purpose of activities, their value to users, methods of engagement, and alternative means of delivering services.

Planning to improve well-being

- 25 The Tailored Review suggested that the Library ‘has the potential to support many more of the Welsh Government’s public policy objectives’. It noted that more extensive consideration of these opportunities could help the Library make a broader contribution to well-being and ‘attract sources of funding to support additional programmes’. It gave the examples of education and skills, health and housing, and local government. The review also suggested the Library should explore or further develop collaborative opportunities with a range of bodies, including post-16 education, Ceredigion Council and other local partners, and local galleries, archives and libraries.
- 26 The Library engaged with many key partner organisations in developing its objectives. This included other libraries and related organisations, higher and further education bodies, and other culture bodies. It is a member of the Historic Wales Partnership⁵ and shared plans for its new well-being objectives with that group. However, the Library did not engage with Ceredigion Council and the Public Services Board.
- 27 The Library considered how it can contribute to different well-being goals and who it might need to work with to deliver on that. These opportunities are reflected in the final well-being objectives and associated steps.
- 28 The Library received its Term of Government Remit Letter from the Welsh Government in December 2021, following publication of its strategy. The remit

⁵ The Historic Wales Partnership is made up of Cadw, Amgueddfa Cymru (the National Museum of Wales), the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, and the Library

covers activities that link to different areas of government responsibility and contribute to several well-being goals. There is broad alignment between the objectives and the remit letter.

- 29 The Library set its second set of well-being objectives in advance of many partners and before Public Services Boards publish their revised well-being plans (due by May 2023). It told us that working to different planning timetables makes it difficult to align objectives across organisations. We appreciate this, though those bodies did have existing corporate or well-being objectives. The Library recognises the need to continue building partnerships (see paragraph 33) and there are opportunities for it to give broader consideration to the objectives and priorities of partners, and potential partners, when setting future well-being objectives. This could help it identify new opportunities and maximise its impact.

Delivering the well-being objectives

- 30 Two key documents support the Library's Strategic Plan: a five-year (term of government) operational plan and an annual operational plan. These operational plans set out how short- and medium-term actions will deliver the vision and well-being objectives.
- 31 Working with others is a prominent feature of the Strategic Plan. The Library has clearly considered how it can involve people in delivering its well-being objectives, as evidenced by planned public participation activity, such as:
- 'We will increase opportunities for volunteering and engaging with the collections on a digital basis, using approaches such as crowdsourcing'.
 - 'We will develop methods and channels for acting in collaboration with the public to jointly interpret our history and culture'.
- 32 The Strategic Plan also includes actions that demonstrate consideration of how the Library can strengthen involvement by drawing on views of users and the wider community:
- 'We will ensure that user feedback and the voice of the user are central to the development of our services'.
 - 'We will establish connections with new communities and audiences'.
- 33 The Strategic Plan also shows that the Library intends to strengthen and expand its relationships with key partners to deliver its well-being objectives and vision. For example:
- 'We will foster a relationship with Higher Education Institutions and research teams interested in the collections'.
 - 'We will explore opportunities to work in partnership to support informal learning in communities across Wales'.
- 34 The Library, like other sponsored bodies, has a remit letter from the Welsh Government that covers the current government term (to May 2026) but was only provided with indicative annual budgets over the term. The Library told us this

makes it difficult to carry out medium-term planning with confidence, particularly for managing its estate and capital projects such as working towards net-zero carbon emissions. The Tailored Review also commented on this issue. The Library's risk register identifies key risks relating to finances, staffing and storage capacity with a 'very high' residual risk rating, highlighting that a shortfall in resources will impact the Library's ability to carry out operational plans and, ultimately, deliver its well-being objectives.

Monitoring the well-being objectives

- 35 The Library has developed appropriate arrangements to measure and monitor progress on delivering the steps to meet its well-being objectives and associated actions in its operational plans. Quarterly or annual targets accompany the actions. The Library provides updates to its Performance and Quality Sub-committee. While we have not reviewed performance arrangements in detail, we looked at the 2021-22 Quarter 4 Update. We found it included updates on progress, linked to the well-being objectives and steps in the operational plan.
- 36 The Library has developed an 'Impact Framework' to measure long-term outcomes and benefits of its Strategic Plan, well-being objectives and associated activities. The framework identifies high-level 'key strategic outcomes'. Each strategic outcome has a long-term benefit(s) and links to the national well-being goals. The Library intends to evaluate the strategic outcomes via qualitative and (where possible) quantitative methods.
- 37 The Library is also trialling the 'Europeana Impact Playbook' on some digital and engagement activities. Europeana is a European Union initiative, and the playbook is a step-by-step approach to help cultural heritage professionals design, measure and narrate their impact. The Library is incorporating its strategic outcomes into the playbook to measure impact in relation to its Strategic Plan and well-being objectives. If successful, the Library will apply the approach to other areas of operational planning.
- 38 We have not reviewed the effectiveness of the impact framework and the Europeana Impact Playbook is still at trial stage. However, it is positive to see that the Library is taking steps to measure long term impact and outcomes, in addition to monitoring short-term progress on actions. The Library will need to continue learning from and refining these approaches as necessary.

Recommendations

R1 The Library should build on the progress it has made in applying the sustainable development principle by undertaking the following when setting future well-being objectives:

- Giving more detailed consideration to relevant future trends, risks and opportunities.
- Extending its stakeholder networks and seeking to involve people who reflect the full diversity of Wales.
- Considering how the Library's work could support partners' objectives, and vice versa.

R2 The Library should ensure that it covers the full range of statutory requirements when developing its next well-being statement, including how it considers it has set well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle.

Appendix 1

Key questions and what we looked for

The table below sets out the question we sought to answer in carrying out this examination, along with some sub-questions to guide our evidence gathering. It also includes some 'positive indicators' that have been tailored to this examination, adapted from those we have previously used to inform our sustainable development principle examinations. This list is not a checklist, but rather an illustrative set of characteristics that describe what good could look like.

To what extent has the body acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting its new well-being objectives?

Planning: Was the process the body put in place to set its well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?

<p>Has the body used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the body's understanding of the 'as is'/ short-term need. • The body has set well-being objectives based on a good understanding of current and future need, risk and opportunities, including analysis of future trends. This is likely to be drawn from a range of local and national sources, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Public Services Boards' well-being assessments – Regional Partnership Boards' population assessments – The results of local involvement/ consultation exercises – Service monitoring and complaints – Future Trends report – Natural Resources Wales' State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales and Area Based Assessments • The body has sought to understand the root causes of problems so that it can address negative cycles and intergenerational challenges through its well-being objectives.
<p>Has the body involved others in developing its well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body uses the results of involvement to help select its well-being objectives. That involvement – whether primary, secondary or a combination – reflects the full diversity of the population. • Involvement reflects good practice and advice from the Future Generations Commissioner.

<p>Has the body considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The well-being objectives have been designed to improve well-being in the broadest sense and make a contribution across the seven national well-being goals. • The well-being objectives have been designed to reflect and capitalise on the connections between different areas of work. • There is a well-developed understanding of how the well-being objectives impact on/ relate to what other public bodies are trying to achieve and opportunities to work together.
<p>Has the body designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body has set objectives that are sufficiently ambitious and have been designed to drive activity across the organisation. • The objectives are designed to meet short and longer-term need. Where objectives are set over a short to medium timeframe, they are set in the context of longer-term considerations or ambitions.
<p>Resourcing and delivery: Has the body considered how it will make sure it can deliver its well-being objectives in line with the sustainable development principle?</p>	
<p>Has the body considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources have been allocated to ensure the objectives can be delivered over the short and medium-term, but the body has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives. • The body has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.

<p>Has the body considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body is drawing on its knowledge of partners objectives/ activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.
<p>Monitor and review: Has the body put in place arrangements to monitor progress and improve how it applies the sustainable development principle when setting its well-being objectives?</p>	
<p>Has the body developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, e.g., by focusing on outcomes that cut across departmental/ organisational boundaries and deliver multiple (including preventative) benefits over the longer term. • There is a 'golden thread' that will allow the body to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.
<p>Is the body seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The body shows self-awareness and a commitment to improving how it applies the sustainable development principle so that it can do so in a meaningful and impactful way. • The body has learnt from setting previous well-being objectives and from applying the sustainable development principle more generally and has improved the process for setting its new well-being objectives. • The body has or plans to reflect on how it has applied the sustainable development principle in this round of setting well-being objectives.



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