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Well-being of Future Generations: An examination of Well-being objective: Protect and enhance the natural environment – **Flintshire County Council**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Gwilym Bury, Bethan Smith, and Jeremy Evans under the direction of Huw Rees.

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Summary report

Summary

Why we undertook the Examination

- 1 In accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) the Auditor General for Wales (the Auditor General) is statutorily required to examine public bodies to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when:
 - a setting their wellbeing objectives; and
 - b taking steps to meet them.
- 2 The Act defines the sustainable development principle as 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'.
- 3 The Auditor General must provide a report on his examinations to the National Assembly for Wales at least a year before each Assembly election. The first such report must be published by 2020, before the 2021 Assembly election.
- 4 The Auditor General has undertaken examinations across the 44 bodies covered by the Act to inform his report to the National Assembly during 2018-19 and 2019-20.
- 5 The findings in this report are based on fieldwork that we undertook during 2019 at Flintshire County Council (the Council). Our approach included a fieldwork scoping workshop with officers from the Council, document review of information provided by the Council and further documents obtained from Natural Resources Wales and other key partners, and interviews with key councillors, officers and partners.
- 6 This report sets out our findings from our examination of the wellbeing objective to protect and enhance the natural environment in Flintshire.

What we examined

- 7 We examined the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle when taking steps to protect and enhance the natural environment in Flintshire so that everyone can use their local environment to improve their health and wellbeing now and in the future? The Council's Plan for 2019-2023 has a Green theme within its wellbeing objectives. Priority steps the Council will take to achieve this theme include:
 - Sustainable Development and Environmental Management including work on: Climate change; Affordable and sustainable collection and treatment services for recyclable, compostable and residual waste; and the Local Development Plan; and

- safe and sustainable travel services including work on: Local transport arrangements; The bus network; Highways; and Active Travel.
- 8 The Public Services Board’s (PSB) Well-being Plan for Flintshire for 2017-2023 also has Environment as one of its priorities to ‘Protect and enhance the natural environment in Flintshire so that everyone can use their local environment to improve their health and wellbeing now and in the future.’
- 9 Steps the Council and its partners will take to achieve this objective include:
- developing greater access opportunities to the green infrastructure such as improving access to rights of way and recreation;
 - protecting and enhancing the environment; improving flood protection;
 - reducing the impacts of climate change; and:
 - the cross cutting theme of Community engagement and education.
- 10 We reviewed the processes the Council and its PSB partners are following to develop and take steps to deliver this wellbeing objective. Our examination has enabled us to assess the extent to which the Council and its partners are considering the sustainable development principle (‘the step’) towards meeting its wellbeing objectives.
- 11 In order to act in accordance with the sustainable development principle public bodies must take account of the following ‘ways of working’:

Exhibit 1: The ‘five ways of working’

The table below sets out the ‘five ways of working’ as defined in the Welsh Government’s **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Essentials**¹ document.

The Five Ways of Working
<p>Long term The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.</p> <p>Prevention How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.</p> <p>Integration Considering how the public body’s wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the wellbeing goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.</p>

¹ Welsh Government, **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 The Essentials**, 2015.

The Five Ways of Working

Collaboration

Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its wellbeing objectives.

Involvement

The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the wellbeing goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

- 12 Our examination found that: The Council has applied the sustainable development principle in developing the step and in taking actions to deliver it, and it has further opportunities to embed the five ways of working as it moves forward.

Detailed report

Part One: Examination Findings

The Council has applied the sustainable development principle in developing the step and in taking actions to deliver it, and it has further opportunities to embed the five ways of working as it moves forward

The Council is considering long-term needs and benefits to protect and enhance the natural environment in Flintshire and recognises the need to promote greater behavioural change by the private sector

What we looked for

- 13 We looked for evidence of:
- a thorough understanding of current and long-term needs and the associated challenges and opportunities;
 - planning over an appropriate timescale;
 - resources allocated to ensure long-term benefits; and
 - appropriate monitoring and review.
- 14 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for the 'long term' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.²

What we found

- 15 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council's vision for the natural environment aims to establish effective approaches to raising community awareness of the natural resources available to them and their protection and enhancement;
 - the Council is focused on coastal green infrastructure enhancement including Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDs) and improved forward planning;
 - Natural Resources Wales (NRW), working together with the support of partners in the PSB, is leading work on developing a North East Wales Green infrastructure map of green assets within Flintshire to help plan for the long term; and

² See Appendix 1

- the Council is collecting some qualitative and quantitative data to measure the short, medium and long-term impacts of its work.

16 We identified the following opportunities:

- the Council could demonstrate more comprehensively the long-term benefits the various projects are delivering and the way in which they integrate; and
- the Local Development Plan aims to deliver this principle, but the Council could encourage all partners to understand the need for greater long-term behavioural change to support the its long-term visions for the environment.

The Council understands the environmental impact of inaction and has considered how its actions can prevent these problems worsening

What we looked for

17 We looked for evidence of:

- thorough understanding of the nature and type of problem the step could help prevent from occurring or getting worse;
- resources allocated to ensure preventative benefits will be delivered; and
- monitoring and review of how effectively the step is preventing problems from occurring or getting worse.

18 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'prevention' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.³

What we found

19 We identified the following strengths:

- the Council is changing the way it approaches its work e.g. the Green Infrastructure pilot (Broughton area) is a strategically planned and delivered network comprising the full range of green spaces. Green Infrastructure includes parks, cycle ways, woods, fields, waste land, allotments, street trees, and green roofs;
- the Dee Coastliners is a cross border project designed to inspire coastal communities on the Wirral and in Flintshire and Denbighshire about the natural heritage of the Dee Estuary with a strong emphasis on regular volunteering, schools engagement and citizen science and learning opportunities;

³ See Appendix 1

- officers and councillors we spoke to have a good understanding of the need for the Council to consider environmental impacts across all its work;
- the Council is promoting several initiatives to achieve carbon reduction and renewable energy; and
- the Council has worked with partner organisations on initiatives in flooding measures to get buy-in to the prevention agenda.

20 We identified the following opportunity:

- given the acknowledged cross-cutting benefits of prevention, the Council could consider the cost benefits of the opportunities for further investment.

The Council has considered how the step supports its wellbeing objective of a 'Green Council' and how the step impacts on the wellbeing objectives of other bodies

What we looked for

21 We looked for evidence of consideration of:

- how this step could contribute to the seven national wellbeing goals;
- how delivery of this step will impact on the Council's wellbeing objectives and wider priorities; and
- how delivery of this step will impact on other public bodies' wellbeing objectives.

22 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'integration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁴

What we found

23 We identified the following strengths:

- the Council has considered how the step could contribute to the seven national wellbeing goals and how it contributes to its wellbeing objectives and wider priorities;
- there is integration of natural assets consideration across planning, development, land management and business;
- there is integration of objectives across all Council portfolios, for example, on flood prevention, coastal landscapes, and green spaces;
- the Council identifies links with other relevant organisations' plans and strategies e.g. the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales with the work on Area Statements; and

⁴ See Appendix 1

- the Council has worked with several partners to develop initiatives and has considered how it contributes to partners' objectives, such as the North Wales Residual Waste Partnership.
- 24 We identified the following opportunity for improvement:
- the Council and its PSB partners could also consider further modelling the impact of prevention in terms of health benefits for the public and how the wellbeing objectives may impact on the objectives of partners.

Collaborative working is a key component of the Council's approach and it is working closely with partners but the cross border links with neighbouring councils in England could be further strengthened

What we looked for

- 25 We looked for evidence that the Council:
- has considered how it could work with others to deliver the step (to meet its wellbeing objectives, or assist another body to meet its wellbeing objectives);
 - is collaborating effectively to deliver the step; and
 - is monitoring and reviewing whether the collaboration is helping it or its stakeholders meet wellbeing objectives.
- 26 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'collaboration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁵

What we found

- 27 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council is collaborating with a range of internal and external partners on initiatives, for example, residual waste treatment;
 - joint working across PSB members to influence communities and business to promote improved green infrastructure planning;
 - more recent initiatives have reduced the number of properties at risk from flooding in Flintshire with those at risk being better prepared and more resilient;
 - the Council is working on an ambitious transport programme with partners in the Mersey Dee Alliance (MDA), including English councils; and
 - work with key partners and landowners to promote biodiversity and greater public access to the countryside of Flintshire.

⁵ See Appendix 1

28 We identified the following opportunity:

- although there are some good examples of cross border co-ordination by the Council, such as prevention of coastal flooding work on the Dee estuary, the Council could consider whether collaboration with neighbouring councils in England could be further strengthened, building on the MDA work.

The Council has involved stakeholders but could extend its engagement activities to ensure that they are fully inclusive

What we looked for

29 We looked for evidence that the Council has:

- identified who it needs to involve in designing and delivering the step;
- effectively involved key stakeholders in designing and delivering the step;
- used the results of involvement to shape the development and delivery of the step; and
- sought to learn lessons and improve its approach to involvement.

30 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'involvement' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁶

What we found

31 We identified the following strengths:

- the Council proactively reviews its approach to involvement and uses this to inform future ways of working. For example, the Council's Impact Assessment process demonstrates community engagement and the Key stakeholder forum was developed for Local Development Plan work;
- the Council developed Active Travel consultation with Flintshire residents;
- partners spoke positively about the way the Council has meaningfully involved them in initiatives such as the North East Wales Area Statement; and
- the Council is successfully increasing the use of volunteers such as the work at Wepre Park.

32 We identified the following opportunities:

- the Council is taking steps to engage with hard to reach groups and communities and other vulnerable people including through a stakeholder group which includes people with protected characteristics. This group considers Council impact assessments, but the Council needs to assure

⁶ See Appendix 1

itself that it is fully discharging its responsibilities under the Equalities Act 2010.

- greater use of data analytics has the potential to help the Council to target their engagement more effectively.

Part Two: Council's response

33 Following the conclusion of our fieldwork we presented our findings to the Council in October 2019 at a workshop that was attended by officers from the Council. At this workshop the Council began to consider its response to our findings. The findings will be presented to the next PSB in January 2020 to agree a position and as a result of these discussions the Council will develop actions. We will continue to monitor the Council's progress in implementing these actions, and the extent to which they address the issues we have identified in our findings. The table below contains our proposals for opportunities for development by which the Council could act more in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its wellbeing objectives.

Exhibit 2: opportunities for development

Opportunities for development
<p>Long term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Council could demonstrate more comprehensively the long-term benefits the various projects are delivering and the way in which they integrate;• the Local Development Plan aims to deliver this principle, but it is not clear if the public and all partners have accepted the need for greater long-term behavioural change; and• the private sector (for example, landowners and private developers) needs to be encouraged to adopt positive behaviour to support Flintshire's long-term vision for the environment.
<p>Prevent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• given the acknowledged cross-cutting benefits of prevention, the Council could consider the cost benefits of the opportunities for further investment.
<p>Integration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Council and its PSB partners could consider further modelling the impact of prevention in terms of health benefits for the public and how the wellbeing objectives may impact on the objectives of partners.
<p>Collaboration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• although there are some good examples of cross border co-ordination by the Council, such as prevention of coastal flooding work on the Dee estuary, the Council could consider whether collaboration with neighbouring councils in England could be further strengthened building on the Mersey Dee Alliance work.
<p>Involvement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the Council is taking steps to engage with hard to reach groups and communities and other vulnerable people but further work is needed to involve these groups and those people with protected characteristics; and• greater use of data analytics has the potential to help the Council to target their engagement more effectively.

Appendix 1

Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

Exhibit 3: Positive Indicators of the Five Ways of Working

The table below sets out 'positive indicators' for each of the five ways of working that we have identified. We have not used the indicators as a checklist. They should be viewed as indicators. They helped us to form conclusions about the extent to which a body is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in taking steps to meet its wellbeing objectives.

What would show a body is fully applying the long-term way of working?

- There is a clear understanding of what 'long term' means in the context of the Act.
- They have designed the step to deliver the wellbeing objective/s and contribute to their long-term vision.
- They have designed the step to deliver short or medium-term benefits, which are balanced with the impact over the long term (within the project context).
- They have designed the step based on a sophisticated understanding of current and future need and pressures, including analysis of future trends.
- Consequently, there is a comprehensive understanding of current and future risks and opportunities.
- Resources have been allocated to ensure long-term as well as short-term benefits are delivered.
- There is a focus on delivering outcomes, with milestones/progression steps identified where outcomes will be delivered over the long term.
- They are open to new ways of doing things which could help deliver benefits over the longer term.
- They value intelligence and pursue evidence-based approaches.

What would show a body is fully applying the preventative way of working?

- The body seeks to understand the root causes of problems so that negative cycles and intergenerational challenges can be tackled.
- The body sees challenges from a system-wide perspective, recognising and valuing the long-term benefits that they can deliver for people and places.
- The body allocates resources to preventative action that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and use of resources over the longer term, even where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs.
- There are decision-making and accountability arrangements that recognise the value of preventative action and accept short-term reductions in performance and resources in the pursuit of anticipated improvements in outcomes and use of resources.

What would show a body is taking an 'integrated' approach?

- Individuals at all levels understand their contribution to the delivery of the vision and wellbeing objectives.
- Individuals at all levels understand what different parts of the organisation do and proactively seek opportunities to work across organisational boundaries. This is replicated in their work with other public bodies.
- Individuals at all levels recognise the cross-organisation dependencies of achieving the ambition and objectives.
- There is an open culture where information is shared.
- There is a well-developed understanding of how the wellbeing objectives and steps to meet them impact on other public sector bodies.
- Individuals proactively work across organisational boundaries to maximise their contribution across the wellbeing goals and minimise negative impacts.
- Governance, structures and processes support this, as do behaviours.

What would show a body is collaborating effectively?

- The body is focused on place, community and outcomes rather than organisational boundaries.
- The body has a good understanding of partners' objectives and their responsibilities, which helps to drive collaborative activity.
- The body has positive and mature relationships with stakeholders, where information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- The body recognises and values the contributions that all partners can make.
- The body seeks to establish shared processes and ways of working, where appropriate.

What would show a body is involving people effectively?

- Having an understanding of who needs to be involved and why.
- Reflecting on how well the needs and challenges facing those people are currently understood.
- Working co-productively, working with stakeholders to design and deliver.
- Seeing the views of stakeholders as a vital source of information that will help deliver better outcomes.
- Ensuring that the full diversity of stakeholders is represented and they are able to take part.
- Having mature and trusting relationships with its stakeholders where there is ongoing dialogue and information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- Ensure stakeholders understand the impact of their contribution.
- Seek feedback from key stakeholders which is used to help learn and improve.

Wales Audit Office
24 Cathedral Road
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone.: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru
24 Heol y Gadeirlan
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: post@archwilio.cymru

Gwefan: www.archwilio.cymru