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Well-being of Future Generations: An examination of 'Reducing child poverty and social isolation and improve economic inclusion' – **Monmouthshire County Council**

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This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Dave Wilson, Charlotte Owen, Allison Rees and Lisa Ridley, programmed managed by Non Jenkins under the direction of Huw Rees.

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Summary report

Summary

Why we undertook the Examination

- 1 In accordance with the Wellbeing 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 well-being 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 in 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 between July and October 2019.
- 6 This report sets out our findings from our examination of ‘reducing child poverty and social isolation and improve economic inclusion’, a step the Council is taking to meet its wellbeing objectives.
- 7 It also sets out the Council’s initial response to our findings.

What we examined

- 8 We examined the extent to which the Council is acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle in reducing child poverty and social isolation and improving economic inclusion.
- 9 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
Long term The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
Prevention How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
Integration Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
Collaboration Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.
Involvement The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves.

- 10 Our examination found that: The Council is starting to apply the sustainable development principle in relation to its social justice agenda, but does not yet have a long-term plan.

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

Detailed report

Part One: Examination Findings

The Council is starting to apply the sustainable development principle in relation to its social justice agenda, but does not yet have a long-term plan

The Council has a good understanding of the issues and challenges but does not yet have a long-term plan to deliver this step

What we looked for

- 11 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.
- 12 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

- 13 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council has a five-year Social Justice Strategy 2017-2022 and action plan (both updated in June 2019). This strategy sets out the issues and challenges in addressing this step and uses the well-being assessment undertaken in 2017 to provide data that highlights the issues of child poverty, social isolation and economic inclusion;
 - the Council established a Social Justice Advisory group. This group is a cross political party group overseeing the delivery of the social justice strategy. The intention of the Advisory Group is to support the strategy becoming a long-term initiative that goes beyond the Council's current political administrative term;
 - following the local government elections in May 2017, the Council created a new Cabinet portfolio for Social Justice to lead on this agenda;
 - the Council plans to work with existing partners and, where necessary, commission new partners to provide qualitative evaluative support to ensure

² See Appendix 1

the impact of approaches and interventions can be measured over time as well as understanding short-term effectiveness;

- the Council has developed a set of questions to guide its evaluation of progress in delivery of the social justice strategy until 2022. The Strong Communities Select Committee will receive progress reports, with Cabinet considering any Select Committee's recommendations; and
- work is taking place with the five Gwent Public Services Boards (PSBs) to commission the development of a set of quantitative measures and surveys that will enable councils to understand the current state of well-being. The development of the Thriving Places Index will measure the local conditions for community well-being and previous work on the Happiness Pulse has helped measure personal well-being. Both tools can be used to inform decision making at a community, ward, or county-wide level as well as comparing well-being across Gwent and other UK regions. The Council intends to use the set of quantitative data to measure progress against this step.

14 We identified the following areas for improvement:

- while the Council considers its Economic Ambition Plan, which looks ahead to 2040, the replacement Local Development Plan and Transport Plan (to 2033) will support long-term projects in delivering this step, there is no single overarching long-term plan for social justice.

The Council has designed this step with a clear focus on prevention but does not have a means of measuring preventative outcomes over the long term

What we looked for

15 We looked for evidence of:

- a 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.

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

³ See Appendix 1

What we found

17 We identified the following strengths:

- in September 2017, the Cabinet approved the restructure of both the Whole Place and the Partnerships Teams into a newly re-focused Community and Partnership Development Team. Two areas of responsibility for this new team are to further support the delivery of the social justice priorities of the Council and to strengthen the communication and links between the PSB, the Council and the needs of local communities;
- the Council has a good understanding of the root causes of child poverty, social isolation and economic inclusion and has many actions in the social justice strategy and action plan to both address and prevent future poverty and isolation. The social justice strategy updated in June 2019 contains 13 new actions to support delivery of the three strategy themes of:
 - putting social justice for children at the heart of what we do – ‘giving children the best start in life, overcoming barriers to attainment and opportunity’;
 - putting social justice and equitable economic prosperity at the heart of what we do – overcoming inequalities in access to economic prosperity’; and
 - putting social justice and social inclusion at the heart of what we do to tackle loneliness and isolation – ‘tackling the scourge of loneliness and isolation’.
- there are nine key areas in the social justice strategy which the Council will measure to ensure there is demonstrable prioritisation;
- examples of actions that support prevention within the social justice strategy are:
 - develop an integrated early intervention and prevention pathway to support children and families at the earliest opportunity and reduce the need for statutory intervention to keep people safe, in particular those with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs);
 - increase the availability and take-up of broadband across the county to address digital exclusion; and
 - including preventing more homelessness, identify and increase private sector housing opportunities and to introduce new housing options such as lodgings based accommodation’.
- reducing child poverty links to the PSB’s collaborative activity on reducing ACEs. The Council was involved in ACEs workshops organised by the PSB to help inform partners of how to mitigate against ACEs which will hopefully result in preventing ACEs over time.

- 18 We identified the following area for improvement:
- prevention initiatives can require overlapping funding and the Council has not identified additional budget to deliver the social justice strategy. The Council is currently considering using grant funding to target the delivery of the step;
 - the Council has not yet developed ways to measure preventative outcomes over the long-term.

The Council has designed this step to contribute to the seven national well-being goals and delivery is well-integrated in some partner plans

What we looked for

- 19 We looked for evidence of consideration of:
- how this step could contribute to the seven national well-being goals;
 - how delivery of this step will impact on the Council's well-being objectives and wider priorities; and
 - how delivery of this step will impact on other public bodies' well-being objectives.
- 20 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'integration' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.

What we found

- 21 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council assessed the contribution of its social justice themes in supporting the seven national well-being goals;
 - the Council's Replacement Local Development Plan (updated in June 2019) was informed by Monmouthshire's Well-being Assessment and outlines 17 objectives with five supporting this step and with each having a direct correlation to the seven national well-being goals;
 - the Council's ambition to reduce child poverty and social isolation and improve economic inclusion features in the PSB well-being plan. For example:
 - tackling the causes of ACEs and the perpetuation of generational problems in families;
 - supporting the resilience of children and young people in relation to their mental health and emotional wellbeing; and

- better understanding the future of work and ensure training and education links with business to identify the skills needed in the Monmouthshire workforce now and in the future.
 - there is alignment with the Health Board’s priorities to provide children and young people with the best possible start in life and to improve Community and Personal Resilience, Mental Health and Wellbeing;
 - PSB partners agreed to adopt the social justice strategy. This support is vital as delivering the social justice strategy requires partner support to achieve, with good relationships between PSB bodies.
- 22 We identified the following area for improvement:
- although there are examples of several council service areas taking responsibility for actions in the Social Justice Action Plan (see Collaboration section), Council officers recognise the need for greater cross-council ownership of the step given the many links between different services, for example, good educational attainment, employment levels, prosperity etc.

Collaboration is a key means of delivering the Council’s social justice agenda and there are well established collaborative arrangements which the Council facilitates

What we looked for

- 23 We looked for evidence that the Council:
- has considered how it could work with others to deliver the step (to meet its well-being objectives, or assist another body to meet its well-being objectives);
 - is collaborating effectively to deliver the step; and
 - is monitoring and reviewing whether the collaboration is helping it or its stakeholders meet well-being objectives.
- 24 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for ‘collaboration’ that we have identified and used as part of this examination⁴.

⁴ See Appendix 1

What we found

25 We identified the following strengths:

- the responsibility to lead on delivering the actions in the social justice action plan is shared amongst several council service areas and external partners. For example:
 - Community and partnership development team
 - Children and Young People service
 - Social Justice Group
 - Monlife
 - Youth services
 - Financial, Economic & Digital Inclusion Partnership (FEDIP)
 - Economy and Innovation
 - Enterprise
 - Housing and Communities
 - Monmouthshire Housing Association
 - Melin Homes
 - Rural Development Programme
- in reducing child poverty, improving parents' economic inclusion is critical. The Council understands it cannot solely address child poverty. For example, the Housing Associations operate a 'Passport To...'. As an example, the Housing Associations are working with social services to train tenants as future care workers. This initiative has many benefits, such as training tenants in new skills, increasing their employability and meeting the shortfall of trained care workers in the County;
- Monmouthshire's multi-agency Early Help Panel is the single point of access for children's emotional wellbeing. The panel aims to ensure that families get the right service, first time, at the right time, and that services work in a joined-up way. In Monmouthshire, all Child and Adolescent Mental Health referrals go via Early Help Panel. This Panel is used as a good practice model across other Gwent councils;
- the Housing service is working closely with health colleagues in supporting Health's priorities. For example, addressing mental health issues and working with patients to move back into communities. There is a Health and Housing group which meets regularly;
- the primary role of FEDIP is to co-ordinate the development and delivery of the Monmouthshire Anti-Poverty Action Plan and work collaboratively to develop and deliver targeted services that tackle financial, economic and digital exclusion across Monmouthshire and to enhance those services which exist currently. The 'Passport to...' Initiative, the young persons

Shared Housing and Holiday Hunger are recent agenda items for this group which consists of several public and third sector partners;

- there is a willingness of council colleagues to work together and build and maintain positive working relationships in delivering this step.

26 We identified the following areas for improvement:

- the Council recognises the need to work with town councils and work is ongoing with clusters of town councils to enable conversations about addressing social justice priorities in those localities;
- the Council recognises a need to address 'holiday hunger' and work is underway with schools and community groups to address this. The intention is for this project to be fully realised for summer 2020;
- Council officers identified a need to better understand the business sector to assess what role this sector can play in delivering against this step;
- the Council has actively chosen to facilitate rather than steer the activities of community and third sector groups in relation to this step, but could consider how effective this approach is and whether it should play a more active role in coordinating collaborative activity;
- while Council officers say that collaboration is working well, they recognise that joint planning and joint commissioning can be further improved as well as further improving the sharing of information.

The Council has identified some groups and individuals it needs to reach to deliver this step and has involved key stakeholders, but is aware that more needs to be done

What we looked for

27 We looked for evidence 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.

28 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for 'involvement' that we have identified and used as part of this examination.⁵

⁵ See Appendix 1

What we found

29 We identified the following strengths:

- there are several examples of Council officers working with children, young people and their families to identify their needs. The 'Team Around Family' works with individual families to set their own goals;
- Council officers engage with the Youth Forum. The current focus as identified by young people is homelessness, mental health and knife-crime. The council and partner organisations are responding with what they are doing to combat these issues and the Youth Forum are mapping what exists in their communities and what the challenges are in accessing those services;
- the Council has a new role of 'Younger persons accommodation officer' to work specifically with young people in resolving accommodation needs;
- the PSB's well-being assessment consultation actively engaged citizens. The consultation helped identify what communities are doing well and what support they need from the Council and its partners with a focus on empowering communities. The Council used this information to inform its Social Justice Strategy;
- the ongoing GovTech⁶ work to improve rural transport provides good examples of engaging with residents who are potentially socially isolated. The researchers for GovTech went into communities by travelling on the 'grass routes' buses (a responsive flexible bus service that makes trips on request) and spoke to the users of the bus service. The researchers also accompanied the 'meals on wheels' service to engage with residents to understand the barriers and suggested improvements. The Council recently announced that it is the first council in the UK to move forward with initiatives aimed at finding solutions to loneliness and limited public transport in rural parts of the County. In September 2019, two initiatives from a list of five, were selected to further develop their initiatives into viable products or services to benefit the County;
- the Council's Youth Service recently won an 'Equality Street' excellence award for LGBTQ+ youth involvement.

30 We identified the following areas for improvement:

- The Council is working with the Department of Work and Pensions to assess the scale of financial, economic and digital exclusion of Universal Credit recipients. Work is also continuing with partners to gain better insight, for example, from Registered Social Landlords. But Council officers stated that there is a need for more data, as well as the capacity and capability to analyse and use it, to understand who on Universal Credit needs help and

⁶ GovTech Catalyst: a UK Government scheme, run by the Government Digital Service, to help technology firms develop innovative fixes to public sector challenges.

the type and scale of the issues they are experiencing. The Council does not currently have data on Universal Credit claimants' digital skills to assess what help they need;

- Council officers told us more work is needed to connect with farmers. Farmers can experience social isolation and face changes due to new technology and Brexit;
- Council officers stated that knowing who in the county needs more support in terms of poverty is crucial in order to work with those individuals and communities to provide services targeted for them.

Part Two: Council's response

31 Following the conclusion of our fieldwork we presented our findings to the Council at a workshop in October 2019 that was attended by the Head of Policy and Governance, Performance Officer, Chief Officer for Enterprise, Head of Economy and Innovation, Housing and Communities Manager, Community and Partnership Development Manager and Changing Practice Changing Lives Lead. At this workshop the Council began to consider its response to our findings and as a result of discussions at the workshop and further reflection on our findings the Council has developed the following actions.

Exhibit 2: the Council's actions

Desired Outcome	Action	Main WoW	Who/When	Resources
A long-term vision for social justice.	Review the current vision and ambition to ensure it looks beyond the medium term and make this explicit in the next update of the strategy.	Long term	Head of Enterprise and Community Animation January 2020	No additional resources required
Social Justice is referenced in all council strategies.	Ensure that authors embed reference to social justice in all strategies within the council's policy framework.	Integration	Head of Policy and Governance As and when policies are reviewed	No additional resources required
Partners and community groups are involved in co-designing and delivering sustainable solutions to complex challenges facing the county.	Work with partners to ensure that the conditions and systems are in place to involve the community in addressing challenges facing the county.	Collaboration Involvement	Community and Partnership Development Manager April 2020	To be confirmed as proposals are developed

Desired Outcome	Action	Main WoW	Who/When	Resources
Enhanced understanding of the issues of poverty and loneliness in local communities to enable better targeting of interventions and measurement of progress.	Increase capacity and capability in data-modelling and use of spatial data and apply this to issues.	Preventative Long-Term	Head of Policy and Governance Head of Digital and Agile April 2020	To be confirmed as proposals are developed

32 We may monitor the Council's progress in implementing these actions, and the extent to which they address the issues we have identified in our findings.

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 Well-being Objectives.

What would show a body is fully applying the long-term way of working?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is a clear understanding of what 'long-term' means in the context of the Act.• They have designed the step to deliver the well-being 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?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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 well-being 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 well-being objectives and steps to meet them impact on other public sector bodies.
- Individuals proactively work across organisational boundaries to maximise their contribution across the well-being 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 sources 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.

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