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# Well-being of Future Generations: An Examination of Creating a Digital Wrexham – **Wrexham County Borough Council**

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Jeff Brown, Alan Hughes 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 the period June 2019 to October 2019.
- 6 This report sets out our findings from our examination of Creating a digital Wrexham, a step that Wrexham County Borough Council (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 Creating a Digital Wrexham.
- 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**<sup>1</sup> document.

The five ways of working
<b>Long term</b> The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
<b>Prevention</b> How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.
<b>Integration</b> 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.
<b>Collaboration</b> Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its wellbeing objectives.
<b>Involvement</b> 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.

- 10 Our examination found that: **the Council has applied the sustainable development principle in developing the step and in taking actions to deliver it. However, there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working into its decision making and planning for its digital aspirations.**

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

# 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. However, there are opportunities to further embed the five ways of working into its decision making and planning for its digital aspirations

The Council is taking steps to future proof its IT network and systems but needs to develop a long-term ambition with clearer outcome measures for its digital strategy

### 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.<sup>2</sup>

### What we found

- 13 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council has taken a longer-term view in its national collaboration on the Contact Centre technology and the shared services that this could facilitate;
  - ICT and digital services have been protected from the current round of budget cuts;
  - the Council's 2019 Annual Governance statement action plan includes a requirement that 'Council decisions demonstrate assessment against the sustainability principle of the Well-being of Future Generations Act'; and
  - the Council is taking steps to future proof its IT infrastructure using a Cloud-based platform, agile development, and leasing rather than purchasing systems and software.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1

- 14 We identified the following opportunities:
- as the Council refreshes its 2017-2020 ICT and Digital Strategy it should ensure that this clearly articulates its digital ambitions and their impacts over the longer term;
  - the Council should review its current suite of five outcome indicators for its first Organisational Well-being Objective and assess if these are sufficient to determine progress and assure itself that it is achieving the milestones and outcomes it expects; and
  - to develop a single long-term delivery plan for digital and ICT.

**Whilst there are implicit preventative impacts through delivering this step, the Council could be more explicit about its prevention agenda**

#### 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.<sup>3</sup>

#### What we found

- 17 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council is exploring the potential of innovative applications such as Alexa and Amazon home care to support its preventative agenda.
  - the Council has prioritised the development of a new back-up facility and improved connectivity to ensure its move to digital is not compromised by poor ICT resilience.
  - Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) aims to prevent digital exclusion and supports capability to introduce new platforms. LFFN provides the opportunity for the private sector to build passive optical networks (PON) around the fibre connection to the public building.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 1

18 We identified the following opportunities:

- the Council needs to ensure that it more clearly articulates its prevention objectives in the context of its digital ambitions;
- better use of robust long-term data would enable a fuller understanding of root causes and a more sophisticated development of services that support prevention; and
- develop a better understanding of any unintended consequences of moving particular services to exclusively digital access (such as increased isolation and loneliness).

**The Council is clear about how this step supports its other wellbeing objectives. However, there is an opportunity to consider more actively the potential impact on partners' objectives**

#### What we looked for

19 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.

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

#### What we found

21 We identified the following strengths:

- the Council has taken the opportunity to redefine its priorities and identified six new in-year priorities which support the delivery of its 14 wellbeing objectives.
- the initial wellbeing objectives including the wellbeing objective under which the digital Wrexham step sits have all been evaluated as to how they contribute towards meeting the seven national goals. Although this evaluation was limited.

22 Some possible examples of opportunities for greater integration are:

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 1

- the PSB is currently in the process of identifying a further priority around community resilience. It will be important that the Council take the opportunity to ensure its digital agenda is fully integrated into this work.
- the Council could do more to ensure that it maximises the opportunity for integrating the New – Welsh Government Hwb Digital Transformation Programme for Schools, with its wider Digital ambition.
- the Council could continue to involve Council members to develop a consensus, based on robust evidence, around the benefits and disbenefits of moving to digital access to services.

## The Council is collaborating with a range of partners to deliver the step; however, it should continue to develop opportunities for digital collaboration and leverage best practice

### 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 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.
- 24 Our examination was also informed by the positive indicators for ‘collaboration’ that we have identified and used as part of this examination.<sup>5</sup>

### What we found

- 25 We identified the following strengths:
- the Council has collaborated with other councils on aspects of its digital agenda, such as the technology to support its ‘Contact Centre’;
  - the Council has established a civic leader’s group which brings together Public and Private sector partners within Wrexham;
  - the Council is a key member of the North Wales Economic Ambition Board (NWEAB) which has prioritised the Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) as a first phase project for the six North Wales Councils; and
  - the Council’s new digital platform Firmstep is used by many other bodies and therefore it is able to leverage this knowledge as it designs its own digital services.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1

26 We identified the following opportunities:

- the Council should ensure that the rapid development of its digital services, including its new website, does not come at the expense of effective collaboration with stakeholders, including the third sector;
- the Council should ensure its services are able to fully utilise any developed digitised customer access: for example, pot hole photos and management of incidents in Street Scene services; and
- the opportunities for further sharing of services with partners using the new contact centre technology should be prioritised.

**The Council recognises that its approach to co-production is still developing. However, it should ensure that its rapid approach to digitisation is not at the expense of genuine co-production**

#### What we looked for

27 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.

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

#### What we found

29 We identified the following strengths:

- the Council has itself recognised that its approach to co-production is currently not optimal and is exploring approaches to address this.
- the Council has taken the opportunity to redesign services to improve customer access. However, the resilience of the ICT infrastructure to support this will need to be closely managed to ensure customer expectations continue to be met.
- there are a number of specific examples where the Council's approach to digital has improved citizen experience – such as with webcasting for Council meetings and the waste collection notifications service.

30 We identified the following opportunities:

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1

- the Council should ensure that the rapid development of its Digital services does not come at the expense of effective involvement and co-production with its service users;
- it will be important that the evolving ICT/digital delivery plan clearly articulates how communities will be enabled and facilitated to support and deliver the digital aspirations; and
- the Council should continue to explore its ambitions around co-production and ensure this approach is consistently used across the Council.

## 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. 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 response

Opportunities – long term	Council actions
As the Council refreshes its 2017-2020 ICT and Digital Strategy it should ensure that this clearly articulates its digital ambitions and their impacts over the longer term.	The Council will be considering and preparing its new strategy and will look to incorporate the longer-term impacts. Clearly this agenda is a rapidly changing area.
The Council should review its current suite of five outcome indicators for its first Organisational Well-being Objective and assess if these are sufficient to determine progress and assure itself that it is achieving the milestones and outcomes it expects.	The Council will review these in its pending refresh of the Council plan.
To develop a single long-term delivery plan for digital and ICT.	The Council will develop this alongside its strategy.
Opportunities – prevention	Council actions
The Council needs to ensure that it more clearly articulates its prevention objectives in the context of its digital ambitions.	Prevention objectives will be considered in the refresh of the ICT and digital strategies.
Better use of robust long-term data would enable a fuller understanding of root causes and a more sophisticated development of services that support prevention.	Work has already commenced on a more sophisticated understanding of digital exclusion and this will be factored into the strategy.
Develop a better understanding of any unintended consequences of moving particular services to exclusively digital access (such as increased isolation and loneliness).	As last point above.

Opportunities – integration	Council action
<p>Some possible examples of greater integration are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the PSB is currently in the process of identifying a further priority around community resilience. It will be important that the Council take the opportunity to ensure its digital agenda is fully integrated into this work.</li> <li>the Council could do more to ensure that it maximises the opportunity for integrating the New – Welsh Government Hwb Digital Transformation Programme for Schools, with its wider Digital ambition.</li> <li>the Council could continue to involve Council members to develop a consensus, based on robust evidence, around the benefits and disbenefits of moving to digital access to services.</li> </ul>	<p>These will be considered when the strategies are refreshed.</p>
Opportunities – collaboration	Council actions
<p>The Council should ensure that the rapid development of its digital services, including its new website, does not come at the expense of effective collaboration with stakeholders, including the third sector. The Council should ensure its services are able to fully utilise any developed digitised customer access: for example, pot hole photos and management of incidents in Street Scene services.</p>	<p>As the Council becomes more confident on delivering its agenda it will ensure engagement with stakeholders including the third sector as appropriate.</p>
<p>The Council should continue to explore its ambitions around co-production and ensure this approach is consistently used across the Council.</p>	<p>As last point above.</p>
Opportunities – involvement	Council actions
<p>The Council should ensure that the rapid development of its Digital services does not come at the expense of effective involvement and co-production with its service users.</p>	<p>The Council will continue to explore co-production. This is current in the libraries services review and digital aspects will form part of this work.</p>

Opportunities – involvement	Council actions
It will be important that the evolving ICT/digital delivery plan clearly articulates how communities will be enabled and facilitated to support and deliver the digital aspirations.	The Council will consider this as part of its refresh of its strategy.
The Council should continue to explore its ambitions around co-production and ensure this approach is consistently used across the Council.	As above with collaboration.

- 32 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.

# 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](mailto:info@audit.wales)

Website: [www.audit.wales](http://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](mailto:post@archwilio.cymru)

Gwefan: [www.archwilio.cymru](http://www.archwilio.cymru)