

Review of the arrangements for setting and monitoring well-being objectives – Public Health Wales NHS Trust

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Summary report

About this report

- 1 This report sets out the findings from the Auditor General's examination of the arrangements for setting and monitoring well-being objectives at Public Health Wales NHS Trust (the Trust).
- 2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act) places a 'well-being duty' on the Trust. The duty requires the Trust to set and publish well-being objectives that are designed to maximise its contribution to achieving each of the Act's seven national well-being goals¹. The duty also requires the Trust to take all reasonable steps, in exercising its functions, to meet those objectives.
- 3 We have undertaken our review to help discharge the Auditor General's duties under section 15 of the Act. The Act requires the Auditor General to 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. Where well-being objectives are the same as an organisation's strategic objectives, our review has considered the strategic objectives through the requirements of the Act.
- 4 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 prevention².
- 5 In designing our approach, we considered what we could reasonably expect from the Trust at this time. Public bodies³ 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, including the Trust, are still developing their experience in applying the sustainable development principle when setting well-being objectives. Therefore, the examination included consideration of how the Trust was applying its learning and how it can improve in future.
- 6 We undertook our review between August and October 2024 and gathered our evidence by reviewing key documents, observing meetings and carrying out interviews with key officers from the Trust. The aim of the review was to answer the overall question: 'Has the Trust acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when reviewing its well-being objectives and determining

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 5 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

³ At the time of our work, 48 public bodies in Wales were subject to the Act.

whether they remain appropriate?'. We did this by exploring the following questions:

- Did the Trust put appropriate arrangements in place for reviewing its well-being objectives?
- Was appropriate information considered when determining the extent to which current well-being objectives remain consistent with the sustainable development principle?
- Are there appropriate arrangements in place to monitor progress and improve how the sustainable development principle is applied when reviewing/setting well-being objectives?

7 We have used a set of positive indicators to assess the Trust's arrangements. These indicators are set out in **Appendix 1**.

Key findings

8 We found that **the Trust acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting and reviewing its well-being objectives, underpinned by substantial engagement and robust intelligence, but there is scope to provide greater linkages between objectives and resource allocation, embed route maps to enable delivery, and further strengthen monitoring and reporting arrangements.**

The process for setting and reviewing well-being objectives

9 We found that **the Trust put robust arrangements in place to set and review its well-being objectives in compliance with the Act and statutory guidance.**

10 The Trust's previous long-term strategy 'Working to achieve a healthier future for Wales' covered the period 2018-2030 and set out seven strategic priorities, which were also the Trust's previous well-being objectives:

- influencing the wider determinants of health;
- improving mental well-being and building resilience;
- promoting healthy behaviours;
- securing a healthy future for the next generation through a focus on early years;
- protecting the public from infection and environmental threats to health;
- supporting the development of a sustainable health and care system focused on prevention and early intervention; and
- building and mobilising knowledge and skills to improve health and well-being across Wales.

11 However, the Trust told us that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly highlighted and exacerbated existing and newer public health challenges. For the Trust, the

pandemic brought a particular focus on health inequalities, the impact of cost-of-living pressures, and the significant pressures on the health and social care sectors. This prompted the Trust to review and update its long-term strategy, with a stated commitment to focus on reducing health inequalities and improve the equity of health outcomes for the people of Wales.

- 12 The Trust began work to develop its new strategy towards the end of 2021 by undertaking a series of consultation and engagement activities with its stakeholder and partner organisations (discussed in **paragraphs 21 to 23**).
- 13 The outcomes from this engagement fed into subsequent work by the Trust to develop and agree its updated long-term strategy, including:
 - **October 2022:** the Trust Business Executive Team and Board Development held sessions to review the emerging strategic intent, which was followed by further engagement with stakeholders, the public, and staff;
 - **December 2022:** the Board agreed the 'Long-Term Strategy Review - Our Emerging Proposition' which was the subject to further discussions with stakeholders to inform the development of the draft long-term strategy;
 - **March 2023:** the Trust Board formally agreed the long-term strategy '[Working Together for a Healthier Wales \(2023-2035\)](#)' and the Integrated Medium Term Plan (IMTP) for 2023-2026; and
 - **May 2023:** publication of the long-term strategy.
- 14 In line with guidance and good practice⁴, the updated long-term strategy sets out six well-being objectives which are also the strategic priorities. These objectives are:
 - influencing the wider determinants of health;
 - promoting mental and social well-being;
 - promoting healthy behaviours;
 - supporting the development of a sustainable health and care system; focused on prevention and early intervention;
 - delivering excellent public health services to protect the public and maximise population health outcomes; and
 - tackling the public health effects of climate change.
- 15 The objectives are designed to improve public health in Wales in the long term. The Trust has also set out phased actions in its subsequent IMTPs, and several supporting enabler strategies and plans that focus on short and medium-term steps to deliver the objectives. These include the International Health Strategy, Digital

⁴ [Statutory guidance on the Well-being Future Generations Act 2015](#) states that 'Public bodies should not treat the requirement to set well-being objectives as separate from the objectives that guide and steer the actions and decisions of the organisation. Given that all public bodies captured by the Act have in place arrangements to express their corporate vision and objectives, public bodies will best demonstrate application of the well-being duty through a single integrated corporate approach.'

and Data Strategy, Research and Evaluation Strategy, Budget Strategy, People Strategy and work underway on engagement and better health through behavioural science.

- 16 The objectives acknowledge the need for a 'whole systems approach to health and social care', the influence of wider determinants on public health, the role of partners and their priorities, and the need to address ministerial priorities. The initial proposal of four priority areas was expanded to include two additional priorities, climate change and promoting mental and social well-being, because of the broad engagement process and focus on whole systems thinking.
- 17 There is also a strong underpinning emphasis on prevention throughout the six objectives, including the need to tackle key public health challenges such as alcohol, obesity, diabetes, smoking, and supporting healthy lifestyles.
- 18 The Trust's Board, as part of the process of developing its IMTP, annually reviews and formally agrees the actions that will underpin the delivery of the well-being objectives, and which are designed to operationalise those objectives. Once agreed, the IMTP is published on the Trust's website. The IMTP is an important document in setting out how the long-term strategy will be operationalised. However, the IMTP can be difficult to find on the website, especially the most recent IMTP (2024-27) and it is not clear for users of the website how the Trust is taking steps to deliver its well-being objectives (**Recommendation 1**). Work to refresh the website is scheduled to begin in March 2025.

Information considered when determining well-being objectives

- 19 We found that **the process of developing the well-being objectives was underpinned by substantial engagement and robust intelligence, with positive work taken to develop route maps to translate the broad objectives into practice steps. However, it has taken some time for the Trust to develop these route maps, and more work is needed to provide clearer links between resource allocations and delivery of the objectives.**
- 20 There was a significant level of engagement and involvement with stakeholders and partners throughout the development of the updated objectives.
- 21 Between December 2021 and April 2022, the Trust held one to one engagement sessions with 20 public and third-sector stakeholders, including those working with seldom-heard groups. At that time, many stakeholders were still focused on the pandemic response and recovery, which made holding group sessions difficult. Further engagement also took place between December 2022 and March 2023 when the Emerging Proposition was discussed with and commented on by stakeholders ahead of the Trust Board agreeing the final long-term strategy.
- 22 The work was complemented by surveys undertaken between December 2021 and March 2022, and again in January 2023. Between December 2021 and March 2022, 3,521 people responded to the Trust's 'How are we doing in Wales' survey, which asks participants about issues relating to public health. In January 2023, the

Trust surveyed an additional 1,072 people recruited via its 'Time to Talk Public Health Panel'. This is a nationally representative panel⁵ of Welsh residents established by the Trust to enable regular public engagement to inform public health policy and practice. In addition, the Trust gained feedback from 480 of its staff through workshops and a survey.

- 23 In reviewing its well-being objectives, the Trust also used updated data from a range of sources including:
- the Trust's own health intelligence databases, including the Public Health Observatory, Wales Public Health Rapid Overview Dashboard, and Public Health Outcomes Framework, alongside other published epidemiological data relating to existing and future health needs in Wales;
 - material relating to the health and social impact of COVID-19, including daily reporting during the pandemic;
 - research and information on the impact of climate change;
 - progress against previous well-being objectives contained in the Trust's Annual Reports;
 - the Trust's existing well-being objectives, the case for change, and the rationale for the new proposed objectives and priorities in its Emerging Proposition; and
 - summary background data and information supporting the new objectives which were included in both the Emerging Proposition and long-term strategy.
- 24 The Trust recognises the need for its well-being objectives to be underpinned by short and medium-term plans and actions. The Trust's IMTPs sets out short and medium-term actions to progress the objectives, drawing in the enabling strategies where relevant, broken down by each quarter over three years. Draft route maps, which aim to connect the broad objectives to more practical delivery actions, were considered at a Board Development session in December 2024. These route maps have been developed with substantial engagement with staff and will inform and support the delivery of the 2025-28 IMTP. They provide much more detail on practical actions sitting underneath the actions to be included in the IMTP. However, whilst the development of these route maps is positive, it is still some two years after the long-term strategy was agreed.
- 25 The delivery of many of the Trust's well-being objectives rely on working with a range of other stakeholders. Those stakeholders will also have their own priorities and objectives to deliver which will also be dynamic and shifting. We recognise that the level and scale of engagement undertaken for the long-term strategy is not an annual process. However, the Trust will need to ensure that partner priorities and

⁵ The panel is designed to be broadly representative of the Welsh population by age, sex, deprivation, ethnicity and health board.

capacity are considered as part of their ongoing engagement processes. The Trust is currently undertaking work to strengthen its approach to engagement.

- 26 As set out in the statutory guidance, the Act requires public bodies to set out how it will ensure that resources, including financial, are allocated annually for the purpose of taking steps to meet its well-being objectives. The Trust's long-term strategy commits to ensuring that 'resources are aligned to our strategic priorities', and the Trust's IMTPs are routinely underpinned by a financial plan. The Trust has committed staff and funding to the development of the strategy and the development of the Health and Well-being Team to support the delivery of the well-being objectives. In addition, the Trust can identify the resources invested in a number of already existing and funded services, such as the smoking cessation programme, and projects funded through the '[Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales](#)' strategy. The Trust, nonetheless, recognises that it has more work to do to consider the resourcing requirements and risks of delivering the well-being objectives over the medium term (**Recommendation 2**).

Arrangements for monitoring progress

- 27 We found that **while monitoring and reporting arrangements are in place, with action already underway to further strengthen performance reporting, more could be done to provide greater transparency and demonstrate impact.**
- 28 Progress against delivery of well-being objectives was reported in the Trust's Well-being Statement (2023) and the Annual Report for 2023-24. These were considered and signed off formally by the Trust Board in July 2023 and July 2024 respectively and published on the Trust website. They reflect the sustainable development principle, and report on progress made by the Trust and through joint working with partners, including examples and case studies.
- 29 However, it is not easy to draw a clear understanding of progress made to deliver the specific planned actions to deliver well-being objectives that are set out in IMTPs from the more general approach to reporting included in the Annual Report. This does impact on the clarity and transparency of annual reporting (**Recommendation 3**).
- 30 To measure the impact of the well-being objectives, the Trust Board receives performance reports at its bi-monthly Board meetings. Since the July 2023 meeting, these have included RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings by percentage of completed actions against the performance milestones set out in the IMTP. Since November 2023, the Performance Report milestone reporting is grouped under the six well-being objectives, along with an additional group which focuses on the enablers needed to successfully deliver the Trust's strategy.
- 31 Since September 2024, the Trust Board has received an updated Performance and Insight Report including more detailed monitoring information relating to the individual objectives. The Board heard that the updated report was intended as an initial step to enhance reporting, with further work to be undertaken to assess how

monitoring information reported to the Board could be improved. The intention is to have a regular reporting process linking the well-being objectives more directly to IMTP and route map milestones.

- 32 The Trust is currently preparing its IMTP 2025-28 whilst awaiting the Welsh Government planning guidance. The Trust recognises that delivering the strategy and IMTP requires close and continuous working with other partners and stakeholders to deliver system-level outcomes and is committed to continued engagement and joint working.
- 33 The well-being objective 'supporting the development of a sustainable health and care system; focused on prevention and early intervention' focuses on prevention, and early intervention. This represents a newer and growing challenge, especially in the respect of chronic diseases such as diabetes. The Trust sees this as a key area for increased effort and focus.
- 34 Whilst we found no evidence of systematic or specific post-project learning on the process for setting the well-being objectives, there was clear evidence of an iterative and agile learning approach, which responded to the outcomes of consultation and engagement.

Recommendations

- 35 **Exhibit 1** details recommendations arising from our work. The Trust's response to our recommendations is summarised in **Appendix 2**.

Recommendations

Transparency of plans

- R1 To improve transparency of actions to support delivery of its well-being objectives, the Trust should ensure that the website is clear about how it is taking action to deliver its well-being objectives, including making its current IMTP easily accessible on its website (**Paragraph 18**).

Resourcing objectives

- R2 To inform the development of future IMTPs, the Trust should set out how it is considering the resourcing requirements and risks of delivering the well-being objectives over the medium term (**Paragraph 26**).

Recommendations

Transparency and clarity of reporting

- R3 When reporting progress against well-being objectives in the Annual Report, the Trust should make the links clearer between the individual objectives and the IMTP milestones and actions (**Paragraph 29**).

Exhibit source: Audit Wales

Appendix 1

Positive indicators used to assess arrangements

Exhibit 2 sets out 'positive indicators' that we have used to assess arrangements in the Trust. This list is not a checklist, but rather an illustrative set of characteristics that describe what good could look like.

Exhibit 2: positive indicators

Positive indicators		
Has the Trust acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when reviewing its well-being objectives and determining whether they remain appropriate?		
Are there appropriate arrangements in place for reviewing well-being objectives underpinned by the sustainable development principle?	Has the Trust considered how the objectives can improve well-being and have a broad impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The well-being objectives have been designed to improve well-being in the broadest sense and contribute across the 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.
	Has the Trust designed the objectives to deliver longer-term benefits, balanced with meeting short-term needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Trust 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.

		Positive indicators
Is appropriate information considered when determining the extent to which current well-being objectives remain consistent with the sustainable development principle?	Has the Trust used data and other intelligence to understand need, risks and opportunities and how they might change over time?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Trust has a clear and balanced assessment of progress against previous well-being objectives that has been used to inform the Trust's understanding of the 'as is'/short-term need. • The Trust 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"> – UK-wide, national, regional and local health intelligence and epidemiological data; – Public Services Boards' well-being assessments and Regional Partnership Boards' population assessments; – the results of national and local involvement/consultation exercises; – Future Trends report; – Natural Resources Wales' State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales and Area Based Assessments; and – data and research on the impact of climate change. • The Trust has sought to understand the root causes of problems so that it can address negative cycles and intergenerational challenges through its well-being objectives.
	Has the Trust involved others in developing its well-being objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Trust 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.
	Has the Trust considered how it can resource the well-being objectives?	<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 Trust has also considered longer-term resources, risks and/or how it can resource longer-term objectives. • The Trust has allocated resources to deliver preventative benefits, where these are described in its well-being objectives.

		Positive indicators
	Has the Trust considered how it can work with others to deliver their objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Trust is drawing on its knowledge of partners' objectives/activity, its relationships and collaborative arrangements to make sure it can deliver on cross-cutting ambitions.
Are there appropriate arrangements in place to monitor progress and improve how the sustainable development principle is applied when reviewing/ setting well-being objectives?	Has the Trust developed appropriate measures and monitoring arrangements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance measures are designed to reflect the sustainable development principle, eg 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 Trust to clearly and transparently report on progress to meeting the objectives.
	Is the Trust seeking to learn from and improve how it has applied the sustainable development principle to setting its well-being objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Trust 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 Trust 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 Trust has reflected or plans to reflect on how it has applied the sustainable development principle in the next round of setting well-being objectives.

Appendix 2

Management response to audit recommendations

Exhibit 3: management response

Recommendation	Management response	Completion date	Responsible officer
Transparency of plans R1 To improve transparency of actions to support delivery of its well-being objectives, the Trust should ensure that its website is clear about how it is taking action to deliver its well-being objectives, including making its current IMTP easily accessible on its website (Paragraph 18) .	<p>The IMTP, also referred to as our Strategic Plan, is only one way in which we communicate the progress we are making on our wellbeing objectives, and in the main, it is written to meet planning requirements set out by the Welsh Government. However, noting that the document itself could be made easier to find, we will commit to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• amending the meta tags on the document so that it will be more easily searchable on our web site; and• updating the title of the website link to our Strategic Plan to indicate that this is our IMTP.	28 February 2025	Executive Director of Operations and Finance

Recommendation	Management response	Completion date	Responsible officer
<p>Resourcing objectives</p> <p>R2 To inform the development of future IMTPs, the Trust should set out how it is considering the resourcing requirements and risks of delivering the well-being objectives over the medium term (Paragraph 26).</p>	<p>We consider the resourcing requirements and risks as part of our integrated planning approach to the development of our IMTPs and will continue to refine and strengthen our planning approach. In addition, Strategic Risks are assigned to an Executive lead to review associated action plans and provide assurance updates to the Executive Team, Board and Committees of the Board.</p> <p>We do not have plans to move delegated authority or restructure to align to priorities, however, we will consider an annual mapping exercise of financial resources against our strategic priorities for future IMTPs.</p>	31 March 2026	Executive Director of Operations and Finance
<p>Transparency and clarity of reporting</p> <p>R3 When reporting progress against well-being objectives in the Annual Report, the Trust should make the links clearer between the individual objectives and the IMTP milestones and actions (Paragraph 29).</p>	<p>As highlighted from September 2024, our performance report included milestone updates which reflect progress by strategic priority (well-being objective). It is now updated and reported monthly in our performance report. We will use our Month 12 performance to report on progress in the performance section of the annual report for 2024-25.</p>	30 June 2025	Executive Director of Operations and Finance



Audit Wales

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

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