

Review of Service Performance Management – Conwy County Borough Council

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Audit snapshot

What we looked at

We reviewed the Council's arrangements for service performance management. We chose this topic because our Audit and Risk Assessment work in 2023-24 identified a potential audit risk relating to the timeliness of performance management reporting.

Why is this important

It is important for councils to have effective performance monitoring and management arrangements in place, so they can fully understand how their services are performing and identify areas where they need to take corrective action. Late reporting can be an indicator that performance monitoring arrangements may not be effective. We undertook the review during the period March to April 2025.

What we concluded

The Council has sound arrangements for performance management reporting. There is a lack of outcome measures in service reporting, which weakens its ability to measure impact. The Council has identified this as part of its continued evaluation of arrangements and has begun to implement improvements.

What we recommend

We make one recommendation, which is to:

- develop a strategic approach to improve its use of outcome data.

Our findings

Sound arrangements for performance management reporting

The Council has a sound performance reporting process. The corporate performance team manages the Council's corporate plan. The corporate plan and its performance measures are challenged by Elected Members before approval and progress is reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny every six months. The plan is evaluated twice-annually, and new objectives and measures can be introduced to reflect changes in priorities and circumstances. This ensures that the plan and measures remain relevant to the needs of residents, workers and visitors.

Guidance provided by the corporate team supports service areas to produce annual service plans and develop performance measures. New measures are quality assured, and annual plans are challenged by senior officers and Cabinet Members before approval. The Council has a centralised performance management system (CAMMS) that is used by service areas to record their performance measures and report progress against them. The consistent use of guidance and a centralised system to support service area plans allows for consistency and oversight by the corporate team.

Some service areas have business managers who provide a dedicated resource and expertise to support performance management. Where this resource is not available, support is provided by the corporate team. This support is wide-ranging and can meet the requests of service areas, but it does not include pro-active structured and in-depth training to services areas to ensure consistency.

Reporting focuses on activity and not impact

The reporting processes for service performance include defined roles for a wide range of officers and Elected Members. The process provides challenge and support to service areas. The Council escalates reporting when poor performance is identified and provided examples. This allows the Council to identify poor performance and implement remedial action in a timely manner.

Performance reporting is linked with financial reporting and risk management, and this provides senior officers and Elected Members with a wider context for performance. For example, we saw an update report on Housing and Homelessness services to the Economy and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 February 2025 which included an update on service performance alongside a review of the service spending and grant income for the financial year. This allows Elected Members to consider both performance and budget position side by side.

The Corporate Performance Team has focused on improving the timeliness of reporting since our Audit and Risk Assessment work in 2023-24. The end of year report for 2023-24 went through the committee cycle in October 2024, but the 2024-25 report is in the Council's work calendar for July 2025. The six-monthly self-assessment report is scheduled to go to committee in November 2025. Shorter reporting timeframes improve the effectiveness of the Council's understanding of performance and its ability to respond to poor performance.

The formats used for calculating performance risk, corporate risk and internal audit risk are not the same. The three types of risks are calculated using a combination of RAG rating (red, amber and green) and RAYG rating (red, amber, yellow and green). The use of different scales to calculate and report risk reduces the comparability of risk information across the Council.

Continuously making improvements

The Council's evaluation processes have identified a range of areas for improvement in its performance management. The Council is also responding to feedback from Elected Members and our reporting. Evaluation of arrangements is a key component of securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The Council uses performance reporting and qualitative commentary from services, aiming to provide a balanced assessment of both the outputs and impact of its services. Elected Members and our previous reporting have highlighted a focus on output data in the Council's performance reporting. For example, in the proposed performance measures for the 2024-25 annual plan, priority 2 ('People in Conwy live in a county which has a prosperous economy with culture at its heart') included 10 proposed measures. Nine of these were outputs (eg number of businesses provided with support and advice, number of visitors in the winter months, number of enquiries to the library and information team) and only one was an outcome (develop an assessment of how events impact on our economy).

The Council has identified actions following its evaluation, including:

- widening its use of outcome data and the service user's perspective, including plans to develop its own stakeholder survey; and
- improving its guidance documents to support service areas develop their annual service plans and reporting processes.

The benefits of these activities could improve performance management across a wide range of service areas and improve the Council's understanding of the impact of its services.

Our recommendations

We make one recommendation:

- the Council has identified a need to increase its use of outcome data and service user perspective data to improve its performance management. This applies to service area annual plans and the corporate plan. The Council should review the performance measures it uses to focus on outcomes to ensure they understand the impact of their activity.



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