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Integrated Care Fund – Western Bay Regional Partnership Board

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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 Anne Beegan, Fflur Jones and Allison Rees under the direction of Matthew Mortlock.

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Introduction

- 1 The Integrated Care Fund (the fund) is allocated by the Welsh Government across Wales. The aim of the fund is to drive and enable integrated working between social services, health, housing and the third sector and independent providers to develop sustainable services.
- 2 Since establishing the fund for 2014-15, the Welsh Government has distributed £270 million across Wales between 2014-15 and 2018-19. In 2019-20, the fund is £115 million.
- 3 Initially focused on supporting older people, and particularly the frail elderly, the scope of the fund has extended over time to include other population groups and projects as set out in [Exhibit 1](#).

Exhibit 1: the scope of the Integrated Care Fund



Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office

- 4 The Welsh Government distributes the fund across Wales to the seven Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs). The RPBs are responsible for overseeing and managing the use of the fund in their area.
- 5 On behalf of the Auditor General for Wales, we have examined whether the fund is being used effectively to deliver sustainable services that achieve better outcomes for service users. We have focused on whether the Welsh Government is effectively managing the fund to deliver against its intentions, and whether RPBs are demonstrating effective use of the fund. We also considered whether the projects supported by the fund are making a clear difference at a local level.

6 In July 2019, we published our national report **Integrated Care Fund**. We concluded that **the fund has had a positive impact, supporting improved partnership working and better integrated health and social care services. However, aspects of the way the fund has been managed at national, regional and project levels have limited its potential to date. There is little evidence of successful projects yet being mainstreamed and funded as part of public bodies' core service delivery.**



7 This supplementary report, which should be read in conjunction with the national report, sets out more detail about our findings for Western Bay Regional Partnership Board. It builds on feedback that we provided to the Regional Partnership Board following completion of our fieldwork.

8 The Western Bay RPB at the time of our fieldwork brought together the three local authorities (Bridgend County Borough Council, Neath Port Talbot Council and Swansea Council), Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board¹, and representatives of the third sector and independent providers. Since 1 April 2019, what is now West Glamorgan RPB excludes Bridgend County Borough Council.



Part 1 summarises partnership working in relation to the fund



Part 2 summarises how the fund is used in the region



Part 3 summarises the regional governance arrangements for the fund

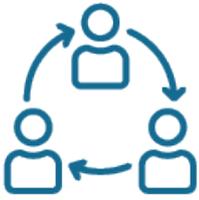


Part 4 summarises the overall impact of the fund in improving outcomes for service users

9 In undertaking this work, we have identified a number of areas that we think the Western Bay RPB could improve upon at a regional level. These are set out throughout this report. We have not made specific recommendations for the RPB; however, the national report contains a number of recommendations which apply to all RPBs.

¹ Following boundary changes relating to the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University Health Board which came into effect on 1 April 2019, what is now Cwm Taf Morgannwg RPB includes Bridgend County Borough Council. The remaining partnership of Swansea Bay University Health Board, Swansea Council and Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council has been re-established as West Glamorgan RPB.

- 10 We have also identified examples of practice from across Wales which the RPB can learn from.
- 11 Finally, we have also identified some key questions that Board members of Health Boards and scrutiny members of local authorities could explore with lead officers responsible for the fund to maintain a close handle on how the fund continues to be used across the region.



Detailed report

Partnership working

- 12 Our national report has identified that **the fund has helped to bring organisations together to plan and provide services**. Health and social care partnerships have been around for some time but integrated working prior to the fund was limited. We found that the fund has provided the impetus for regional partners to develop integrated services and to move to joint funding arrangements in the context of wider policy and legislation.
- 13 In Western Bay, members recognised that the RPB has been on an improvement journey since being established in 2016. Partners have been open to using core and other funding such as winter pressure monies to support Integrated Care Fund projects.
- 14 As part of our survey of RPB members, we asked:
 - whether the RPB facilitates good partnership working; and
 - whether the partner organisations demonstrate a commitment to partnership working.
- 15 The responses we received from Western Bay were slightly less positive than the all-Wales average but were still generally positive.
- 16 As part of our surveys of RPB members and project leads, we also asked about the impact of the fund on partnership working. The responses we received from Western Bay confirmed positive views about the impact that the fund has had on strengthening partnership working ([Exhibit 2](#)). The full regional responses to the surveys can be found in [Appendix 1](#), along with the response rates.

Exhibit 2: respondents to our surveys across Western Bay told us that...

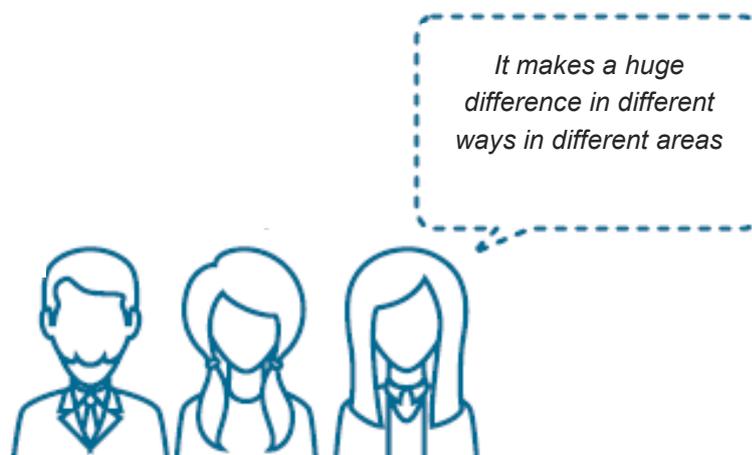


Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office surveys of RPB members and project leads



Detailed report

Use of the fund

17 Our national report identified that aspects of the way funding has been allocated by the Welsh Government and used by regional partners have limited the potential of the fund to date. The report highlighted that Regional Partnership Boards can find it difficult to balance local population needs with the Welsh Government's indicative allocations for target groups. It also highlights that RPBs use the fund in different ways, not all of which support a regional focus. We found that the approaches to the use of the fund vary between the regions, with limited sharing and learning of the approaches used across Wales.

Exhibit 3: approaches applied to the fund 2014-18

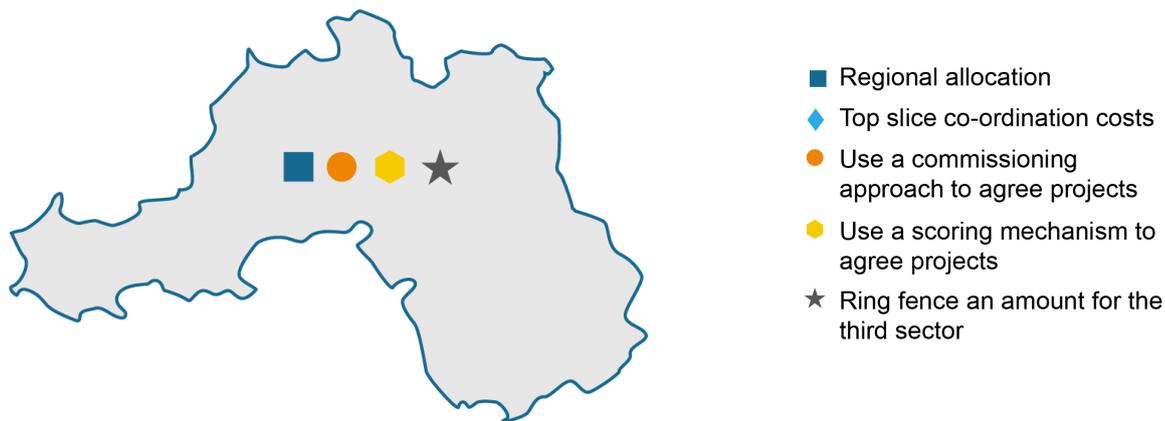


Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office

18 Western Bay RPB makes good regional use of the funding and partners have also begun to support some projects with core funding. The RPB does not top-slice the fund for co-ordination and project management roles, but rather resources such posts via other joint funding arrangements. A proportion of the fund is ring-fenced for the third sector to bid for and we found that the third sector in Western Bay feels it generally has fair access to ICF, though it feels the application process is complex. There are two specific pots that third sector organisations can bid for: small and large grant schemes. Third sector organisations have also had priority over slippage in past years.

- 19 Some RPBs recently began allocating the fund by commissioning thematic groups to identify a programme of work that the fund can support, rather than openly seeking bids from member organisations. Western Bay is one of these regions. Excluding the ring-fenced amount for the third sector, thematic regional groups that represent different population groups allocate the fund on behalf of the RPB in line with the region’s priorities. We observed good discussion in determining the use of the fund, and a robust criterion and scoring mechanism used for bids, particularly for third sector bids. Projects put forward broadly aligned with partners’ corporate objectives on prevention and integration although we found no requirement that projects needed to link to the strategic objectives of the RPB and local wellbeing objectives to support implementation of the **Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**.
- 20 Our work also highlights that the RPBs have developed varying approaches for managing underspends. Western Bay has not previously had a formal process to agree the use of underspends and acknowledges that it has not managed underspends in a timely way in previous years. Several different approaches have been used in the region in the past. In 2018, Western Bay RPB agreed a formal process for its thematic regional groups to manage underspends and to escalate any unallocated underspends.

Areas for improvement

- Simplify the bidding process for the third sector ring-fenced amount of the Integrated Care Fund





Detailed report

Governance arrangements

- 21 Our national report has identified that governance arrangements for the fund need to be further developed to strengthen central oversight and ensure greater consistency across the regions. The report highlights that RPBs frequently delegate responsibility for the fund to a sub-group and there is limited scrutiny of the use of the fund by health boards and local authorities. The report also identifies that the rigour of project management varies between RPBs and organisations, and few projects involve service users at the outset.
- 22 In the Western Bay RPB, the fund is delegated to thematic regional groups (eg Commissioning for Complex Needs) which report to a Programme Team. This Team in turn reports to the Leadership Group and then to the RPB. However, we noted that attendance at the Leadership Group had declined in 2018, which could impact on the ability of that group to make decisions.
- 23 All the RPBs have representation from the statutory bodies, although representation from housing prior to the 2018 amendment to the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 was variable. We highlighted to the Western Bay RPB the need to consider if it has sufficient housing representation and if the balance between Health Board and Local Authority members is right. Due to the number of local authorities in the region, the size of the Western Bay RPB membership can create challenges in decision-making, discussions and gaining consensus. As in several regions, Western Bay representatives eg third sector, carers and service users feel attendance at the RPB can be a drain on their time given detailed discussion relating to use of the fund often takes place outside of RPB meetings.
- 24 The Western Bay RPB has taken some steps to link its work with local Public Service Boards (PSBs), by making links between the Area and Wellbeing Plans and having consistency in membership. We found scope to further clarify and improve links between the RPB and the Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend PSBs on a regular and ongoing basis by identifying how the PSBs link to the Western Bay RPB structure. Following completion of our fieldwork we are aware that the RPB has begun meeting with the PSB co-ordinators on a quarterly basis to link work programmes and avoid conflict and duplication.
- 25 At a project level, we found both strengths and weaknesses in the management of funded projects ([Exhibit 4](#)).

Exhibit 4: strengths and weaknesses in management of projects

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ A requirement for project leads to work and report against agreed goals targets✓ Project leads want to engage service users when planning projects✓ Risk management of projects✓ Locally there appear to be generally good oversight arrangements for funded projects, based on adopting arrangements from the host organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ Project management methods vary✗ Not clear whether project risks are feeding into organisational risk monitoring

Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office fieldwork

26 In common with many other regions, Western Bay RPB is consistently unable to collate, scrutinise and sign-off project monitoring information by the tight deadline required by the Welsh Government. Sign-off often takes place before the RPB has been able to scrutinise monitoring returns.

Areas for improvement



- Develop mechanisms for reporting back to individual organisations in a more consistent way
- Address low attendance rates by members of the Leadership Group
- Strengthen project management arrangements across all Integrated Care Fund projects



Detailed report

Outcomes for service users

- 27 Our national report has identified that despite positive examples, the overall impact of the fund in improving outcomes for service users remains unclear, with little evidence of successful projects yet being mainstreamed. The report highlights that RPBs identify a range of positive case studies, but there is little evidence that successful projects have yet been mainstreamed and funded as part of public bodies' core service delivery.
- 28 Western Bay RPB members felt that the fund is used to fund the right projects, and that the focus is on outcomes when overseeing the use of the fund. The Western Bay regional partners are getting better at capturing performance data for the projects, but acknowledge that capturing consistent and comparable outcomes, rather than output data remains a challenge.
- 29 Similarly, to other RPB areas, Western Bay RPB members continue to struggle to successfully share information which makes demonstrating impact and outcomes from a multi-agency view very difficult. Project leads are increasingly attempting to demonstrate the impact of projects through case studies, including through the use of video stories.
- 30 In common with other RPBs, in Western Bay there are few examples of projects being mainstreamed due to financial and savings pressures. Project leads find it particularly difficult to quantify financial savings due to the preventative nature of projects. Such projects aim to manage demand and improve services and it is difficult to quantify these outcomes as a financial saving. A number of projects do not have a clear exit strategy should the funding cease. Routine evaluation of projects is not in place although some evaluation does take place at a local level on an ad hoc basis. Many projects are continuously rolled forward from previous years, limiting opportunities to use the fund to develop new and innovative projects. While still reliant on the fund, a number of the projects are now considered as part of core services.

Exhibit 5: challenges identified with mainstreaming projects through our project lead survey across Western Bay



Exhibit source: Wales Audit Office survey of project leads

31 In contrast to many regions, Western Bay has taken steps to share learning between partners within the region, which provides opportunities to improve projects and deliver them more efficiently. Western Bay RPB has engaged proactively in shared learning between itself and its neighbouring RPB (West Wales RPB), which enables opportunities in developing and delivering projects. However, the Western Bay RPB acknowledged it could do more in terms of sharing learning and good practice, including sharing learning from similar projects run in the different county areas across the RPB.

Areas for improvement



- Explore ways to improve sharing access to information between partners to enable organisations to demonstrate the benefits of projects on a multi-organisational basis
- Develop exit strategies for all Integrated Care Fund projects
- Learn from good practice in other regions beyond West Wales

Appendix 1

Key findings from our surveys of RPB members and project leads

Our survey of Western Bay RPB members²³ identified that

		Across Wales...
	5 out of 10 agreed that partner organisations demonstrate a commitment to partnership working	84%
	2 out of 9 agreed that there were appropriate links with other regional groups and forums, such as Public Services Boards, to ensure that there were no overlaps or gaps in responding to legislative requirements	56%
	4 out of 8 agreed that the ring fencing of the fund for the national initiatives was helpful	53%
	4 out of 9 agreed that the templates provided by the Welsh Government for quarterly reporting capture the right information	34%
	4 out of 7 agreed that there was helpful ongoing communication between the RPBs and the Welsh Government to understand any changes to the fund	63%
	9 out of 10 agreed that proposals put forward for the RPB to approve are generally good quality	80%
	5 out of 10 agreed that the RPB sets enough time aside for effective scrutiny of the delivery of the projects supported by the fund	57%
	7 out of 10 agreed that there is a clear process for monitoring and managing project underspends and overspends within the RPB structure	72%
	6 out of 10 agreed that the RPB and its sub-group focus on outcomes when scrutinising the projects	69%
	6 out of 10 agreed that the fund is funding the right projects	64%
	8 out of 10 agreed that the projects funded were making a difference to service users	87%

² Only 10 of the 28 (36%) RPB members invited to take part in our RPB member survey responded.

³ Not all members responding answered every question.

Our survey of project leads⁴ across Western Bay identified that

		Across Wales...
	7 out of 8 identified that their project(s) had received funding in previous years	71%
	4 out of 8 identified that their project(s) received additional funding as well as the Integrated Care Fund	48%
	7 out of 8 identified that their project(s) clearly linked to national strategic priorities, including the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act	92%
	3 out of 8 identified that there was a risk management framework for their project(s)	58%
	7 out of 8 identified that they had received appropriate guidance from managers to support them in delivering the project(s)	89%
	3 out of 8 identified that they were required to include an exit strategy as part of their project plans	40%
	8 out of 8 identified that there was a single point of accountability for delivery of the project(s)	78%
	2 out of 8 identified that their project(s) started on time	32%
	3 out of 7 identified that there was a mechanism to measure the financial benefits of the project(s)	40%
	5 out of 8 identified that they had been able to demonstrate the impact of the project(s)	60%
	5 out of 8 identified that the fund is helping to provide sustainable and improved services in their region	66%
	4 out of 8 identified that there were challenges in mainstreaming the project(s)	75%
	7 out of 8 identified that the project(s) was making a difference to service users	91%

⁴ Eight of the 23 (35%) project leads invited to take part in our project lead survey responded.

Appendix 2

Examples of notable practice

In undertaking our work, we have identified a number of areas of practice which other RPB areas could learn from.

Across the **Cwm Taf Morgannwg** regional footprint, development work has been undertaken between the Regional Partnership Board and the Cwm Taf Public Service Board to identify areas of crossover between the partnerships, and to agree the responsibility of each. To strengthen these arrangements, a representative from the RPB sits on the PSB as a non-voting member and vice versa, ensuring communication between the partnerships.

The **West Wales** Regional Partnership Board has developed a strategic approach to using underspend. When allocating money to new projects at the beginning of the financial year, the unsuccessful projects are ranked using the same scoring mechanism as the successful projects. The highest scoring projects are identified and agreed as to be delivered via any underspend that occurs. This approach means that the regional partnership board is not trying to use up underspend at the end of the year on short term interventions.

Following an internal review, the **Cardiff and Vale** Regional Partnership Board has developed a performance dashboard to monitor the Integrated Care Fund. The dashboard supports quarterly reporting of planned and actual levels of activity, impact and outcomes being achieved by the fund using a RAG rated system to visually identify projects that are off track.

In the **Greater Gwent** Regional Partnership Board, roles and responsibilities of the RPB and its subgroups are set out in a memorandum of understanding. Signed by all partners, the document sets out their shared intention to work together in a spirit of cooperation for the benefit of residents living in Gwent. The memorandum includes a conflict resolution process which has supported open and honest discussions between partners should conflict arise.

These examples are not exhaustive. Further examples can be found in the materials produced following our recent Good Practice Exchange webinars '**Key Issues for Regional Partnership Boards**' which are available to view on our website [audit.wales](https://www.audit.wales)

Appendix 3

Key questions for Board and scrutiny members

To enable Board members of Health Boards and scrutiny members of local authorities to maintain a close handle on how the fund is used across the region, we have identified some examples of questions that could be used with lead officers responsible for the fund and lead officers who are members on the RPB.

Partnership working

- Is the organisation challenging existing working practices and actively seeking new opportunities through the fund to work in partnership with its regional partners?
- Is the organisation considering options to utilise funding more effectively, for example by combining various funding streams, where appropriate, to support services to achieve greater impact?

Use of the fund

- Is the organisation through its representatives on the RPB effectively engaging with relevant stakeholders, including the public, to inform its plans for the use of the fund?
- Is the organisation through its representatives on the RPB ensuring third sector organisations are equal partners and have fair access to the Integrated Care Fund at the beginning of the financial year and in-year?
- Is the organisation through its representatives on the RPB ensuring the approach to assessing, prioritising and approving services in receipt of the Integrated Care Fund is robust?
- Is the organisation through its representative on the RPB ensuring that the fund is used in a way that maximises value for money (for example, by reducing administrative costs)?
- Is there an effective approach to managing fund underspends in-year?

Governance arrangements

- Is there a mechanism in place to ensure the organisation is regularly kept up-to-date about the work of the RPB and its sub-groups in relation to the fund?
- Is there a robust risk management framework in place for the services funded through the Integrated Care Fund, and who would be responsible for any unforeseen issues with projects?
- How does the organisation and the RPB get assurance that the approved Integrated Care Fund projects are managed effectively and that the reporting of approved projects is accurate?

Outcomes for service users

- Is the organisation working with its RPB partners to evaluate what difference funded initiatives have made in terms of outcomes for the regional population?
- Is the organisation working in partnership with its RPB partners to demonstrate outcomes from a multi-agency view?
- Are there services continually funded through the Integrated Care Fund which would significantly impact on the organisation if they were to cease ie those now considered core services?
- Is the organisation mainstreaming Integrated Care Fund projects that have demonstrated a positive impact?
- Is the organisation supporting the RPB to facilitate shared learning within the region to enable continuous improvement of project development and management, and the roll-out of successful localised projects?
- Is the organisation supporting the RPB to engage with other regions to share information and learn lessons from other examples and experiences of the Integrated Care Fund?

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