

Use of performance information: service user perspective and outcomes

December 2024

What we will cover



- Introductions and role of Auditor General for Wales
- Why we did the review and importance of service user perspective and outcomes performance information
- Focus of our review – what it covered and didn't cover
- What we looked for
- What we found
- Where we are now and next steps

Introductions



- Gary Emery, Audit Director, Performance
- Sara-Jane Byrne, Audit Manager, Performance
- Role of the Auditor General of Wales
 - Independent of the Senedd & Welsh Government
 - Statutory auditor for most of the Welsh public sector.
 - Oversees annual audit of some £24 billion of taxpayers' money
 - AGW has to assure himself that councils have arrangements to secure VFM in use of their resources and that they are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle as per the Well-Being of Future Generations Act 2015.

Why did we do the review? Why service user perspective and outcomes information is so important



Councils are public bodies. They provide important services to the public using public money.



Understanding outcomes and service user perspective is fundamental to understanding value for money.



To understand the impact of activities and policies and whether they are achieving what they intended to.

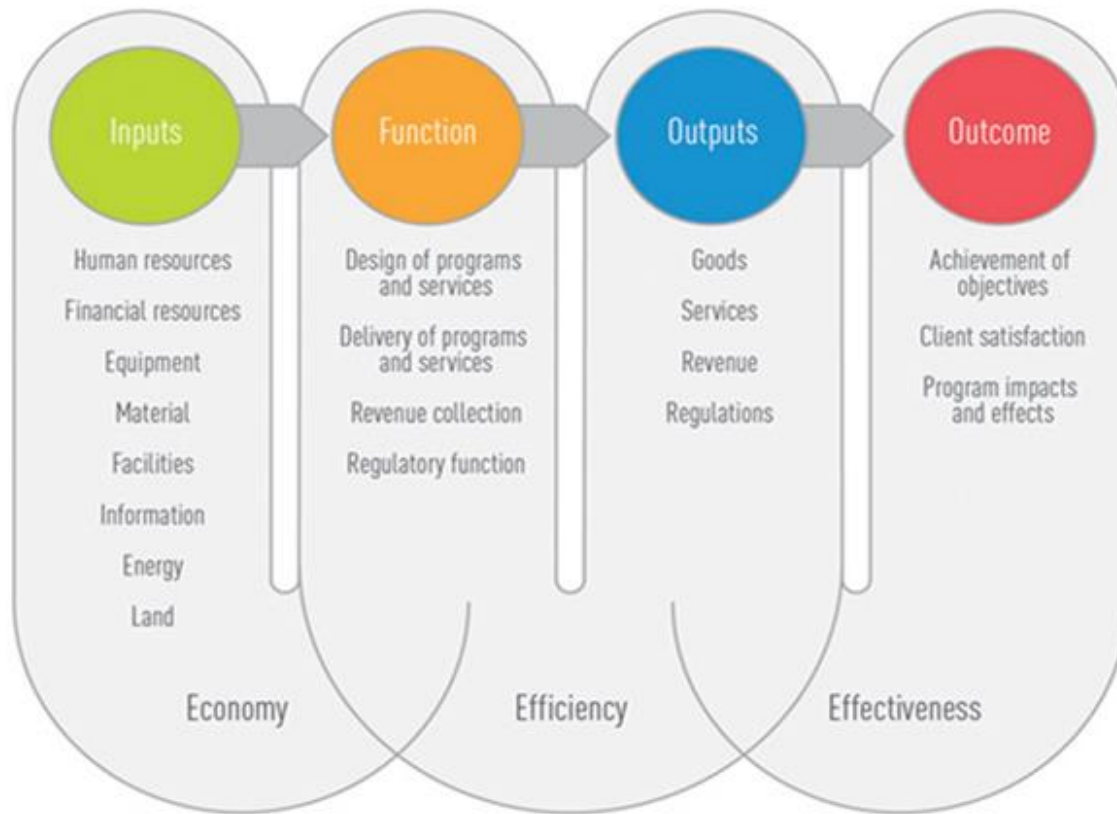
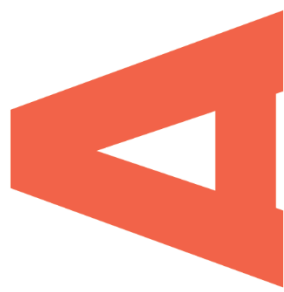


The importance of understanding outcomes and service user information have been emphasised for years.



Key to effective performance management.

The three Es.



What our review was about



- Whether performance information provided to senior leaders helps them understand the perspective of service users and outcomes of councils' activities so they can manage performance.
- Focused on the main performance reports councils use to monitor and manage performance.
- Councils' arrangements for checking the accuracy of performance information.
- What do we mean by senior leaders?
- What do we mean by perspective of service users?
- Outcomes and outputs.
- Review done across the 22 councils in Wales.

What our review was not about



- Councils' consultation and engagement arrangements.
- How councils engage with service users about changes to services or policies.
- Reviewing overall performance management arrangements.
- Checking the accuracy of councils' performance information - it was about reviewing councils' arrangements to do this.
- In line with INTOSAI standards, we set out our audit question and audit criteria in our project brief and shared this in advance with councils. This gives an overview of what we were looking for.

What we looked for



- Performance information to help leaders know the extent to which services and policies were meeting needs of service users and if they were achieving the intended benefits.
- That this information was at the heart of councils' performance reports.
- There was a range of performance information, drawn from a range of service users.
- Information was being used to monitor progress and take action where necessary to improve outcomes.
- More than just inputs and outputs or narrative about what a council had done.
- For information to be relevant to councils' priorities and objectives.
- There had been thought and rigour behind the performance information.
- Robust arrangements to check the accuracy of data.

What we found



Not a very positive picture.

Senior leaders are provided with lots of performance information

Most reports focused on outputs rather than evaluation of the 'so what.'

Lots of description about what councils had done

Generally, minimal information about outcomes and service user perspectives. Exception of one or two councils.

Limited arrangements to check the accuracy of information

Service user perspective information largely in social services. Complaints and case studies in some, but doesn't provide a comprehensive and representative picture of performance.

Outcomes – some limited examples, some reporting broader outcome measures

Performance information wasn't always relevant to objectives

What we found



Outcomes

- Some use of broader outcome measures.
- Largely focused on activities and outputs despite guidance emphasising importance of outcomes.
- Descriptive rather than evaluative.

Service user perspective

- One or two had made effort on this.
- Most provided little.
- Where we did find some, mainly in social services.
- Complaints and case studies but not always representative.

What we found



Data accuracy arrangements

- Largely sense checking.
- Some guidance documents.
- Few Internal audit reviews.
- Focus on trust.

Use of the information

- As most had limited information, extent to which they could use this was, therefore, limited.
- Where we did find information, councils were using that information.

What the findings mean – why we were so concerned?



Lack of information about outcomes and perspective of service users means we couldn't see how councils know whether they are really meeting service user needs or how well they are spending public money.



Huge effort and resource often goes into producing these reports, but the information doesn't always tell senior leaders what they need to know.



Raised some significant concerns to us about value for money arrangements and whether councils have effective performance management arrangements.



Our findings were stark as the concepts are not new.

Challenges and overcoming those



- Know understanding and measuring outcomes can be challenging for multitude of reasons. Struggled to find good practice to point to.
- We wanted to see that councils had given some thought to the performance information they were providing eg what information they would need to understand outcomes relevant to their objectives.
- Recognise that some performance information is expected to be reported.
- Often seen as down to central teams – cultural issue. Members need to challenge whether the information is helping them to understand outcomes. Is it relevant? To ask the ‘so what’ question.
- Not about how the data is presented.

Where are we now and next steps



- Produced local report for each council and a national summary report.
- Some discontent about our findings.
- Dust settling, been period of reflection.
- Despite limited good practice, want to encourage councils to do more to strengthen their performance information – we want to find a more positive position when we follow-up our review.
- Not looking for the finished article, know its not easy.
- Opportunities for bodies to work together on common objectives.
- Start from the objectives and work up.
- Implications for Welsh Government - robustness of self-assessments.





Thank you

Any questions?