

Review of Involvement – North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Audit year: 2019-20

Date issued: April 2020

Document reference: 1842A2020-21

This document has been prepared as part of work performed in accordance with statutory functions.

In the event of receiving a request for information to which this document may be relevant, attention is drawn to the Code of Practice issued under section 45 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The section 45 Code sets out the practice in the handling of requests that is expected of public authorities, including consultation with relevant third parties. In relation to this document, the Auditor General for Wales, Audit Wales and, where applicable, the appointed auditor are relevant third parties. Any enquiries regarding disclosure or re-use of this document should be sent to Audit Wales at infoofficer@audit.wales.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

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

The team who delivered the work comprised Robert Lloyd, Steve Frank and Euros Lake.

Contents

The Authority has pockets of good engagement activity but is yet to shift to an integrated strategic approach to involvement.

Summary report

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015	4
Involvement	5
Scope of our audit	6
Our findings	6
Proposals for improvement	12
Appendices	
Appendix 1 – examples of involvement approaches in UK Fire and Rescue Authorities	16

Summary report

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations Act (the 'Act') requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act also puts in place a 'sustainable development principle' which tells those public bodies covered by the Act how to go about meeting their duty.
- 2 Public bodies need to make sure that when making their decisions they consider the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales both now and in the future. There are five things that public bodies need to think about to show that they have applied the sustainable development principle. These are set out in **Exhibit 1**. Following these ways of working will help public bodies to work together better, avoid repeating past mistakes and tackle some of the long-term challenges facing Wales.

Exhibit 1 – the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working



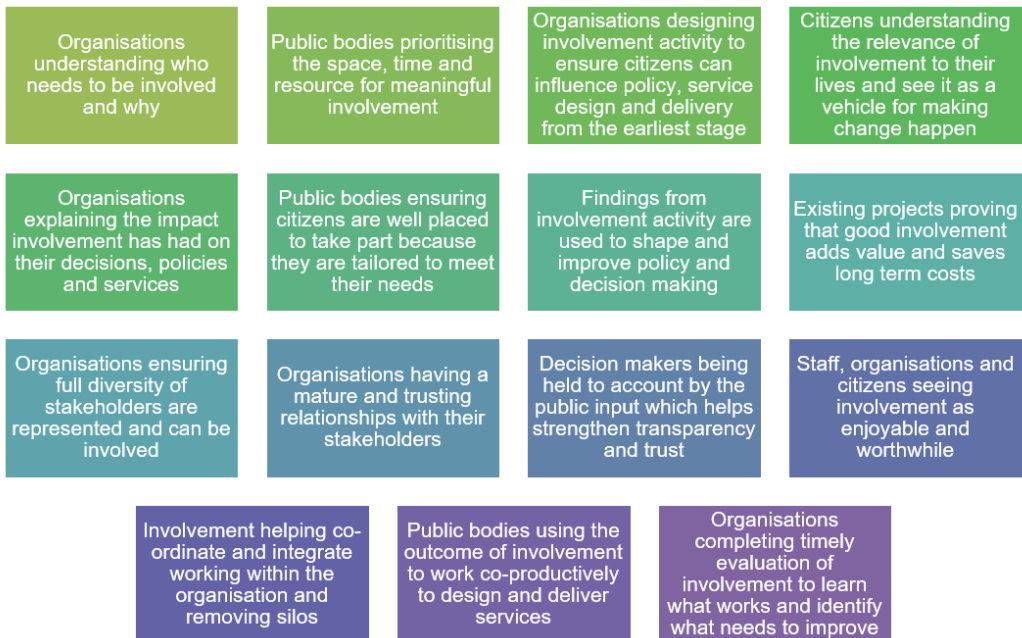
Source: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – [The Essentials](#)

Involvement

- 3 Involvement is about having rich and meaningful conversations with the people in their community, finding out what matters to them, and reflecting that in the decisions that Authorities take. Involvement requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of ‘working with’ rather than ‘doing to’. In contrast to consultation, involvement approaches work with people at earlier stages, such as helping to identify issues and potential solutions, and being supported to remain involved right throughout design, implementation and evaluation processes.
- 4 Drawing on our most recent feedback presentation considered at the Fire and Rescue Authority’s (the ‘Authority’) Executive Panel on 29 July 2019, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales’ [Journey Checker](#) and the [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#) developed by Participation Cymru, **Exhibit 2** summarises the characteristics of an organisation with an effective approach to involvement.

Exhibit 2 – the characteristics of a public body which has an effective approach to involvement

Effective involvement is embodied by....



- 5 Authorities should therefore set their agenda by listening to people, meaningfully involving them throughout the decision-making process, and being open to real change as a result. It is vital that activities and mechanisms for involving people are appropriately planned, monitored and reported, so they can be developed, challenged or championed. Ensuring that staff and organisations have the necessary skills, structures as well as time and resources to involve the public effectively is vital. This ensures that public services in Wales reflect what is important to the public and their needs, rather than what we may traditionally think works best.

Scope of our audit

- 6 Given the challenges for public bodies in embodying the sustainable development principle, we have on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales reviewed the Authority's approach and management of involving stakeholders when proposing service and policy changes, and in the design of activities. We undertook a detailed review of how the Authority involves stakeholders in the following areas:
- interventions to reduce incidents of arson on Caia Park estate, Wrexham; and
 - the design and development of StayWise Cymru – an online educational resource hub for 'blue light' services and their partners with content tailored to meet both the Fire and Rescue Services' aspirations and curricular requirements.

Our findings

- 7 Overall, we have concluded that the Authority has pockets of good engagement activity but is yet to shift to an integrated strategic approach to involvement. We came to this conclusion because we found the following.

The Authority can demonstrate effective involvement in tackling arson incidents but identifying who to involve in its wider work remains a challenge

- 8 We found good examples of involvement activity relating to arson reduction in Caia Park, Wrexham. Working with key partners and using data, the Authority's Arson Reduction Team spent time understanding the unique nature of the arson problem in the area. This included understanding the cyclical pattern of incidents, identifying the key community leaders, a lack of trust in emergency services, and a cultural acceptance of arson attacks as 'the norm'. All this contributed to citizens' reluctance to come forward with information to help with Authorities' enquiries. The scanning and analysis undertaken by the Arson Reduction Team also found a method of fuse-lighting vehicle fires, thought to be unique to the area. This reflects

the Authority's appreciation of the nuances of local issues and community behaviours, which enabled it to develop tailored solutions.

- 9 We found that Members and officers value the importance of effective partnership working in strengthening their involvement activity, not least in avoiding duplication or overlap and to give clear messages to communities. The Authority capitalised on local partners' expertise in engaging with the Caia Park community in order to address traditional communication and trust barriers. To build bridges and trust with the local community the Authority worked with local youth clubs to co-produce videos promoting fire safety and arson messages¹. The involvement of Wrexham County Borough Council as the main landlord for the estate was described as a 'game-changer' as it enabled the Authority to engage directly with tenants.
- 10 Positively, third sector partners such as the Caia Park Partnership received training from the Authority on how to deliver Consequences of Crime workshops to residents of the estate. These workshops were delivered in local youth clubs. The Authority's positive approach to collaboration is reflected in partners broadly feeling valued and involved. However, the effectiveness of collaboration can vary and is susceptible to changes if key personnel move on or are re-allocated to other work.
- 11 It is commendable that the Authority took a leading role in developing and delivering the Problem Orientated Policing Plan (POP Plan) to tackle arson in Caia Park. The intervention led to a reduction of 96% in vehicle fires over its period, and, despite a recent increase in the number fires in the area, the Authority and its partners believe that the longer-term cycle of increasing arson incidents has been broken. Despite this success, the Authority recognises that its capacity to sustain its leading role in such partnerships is questionable.
- 12 The Authority was responsive to residents' views in developing the solutions laid out in the POP Plan and involvement is therefore making a visible impact. Community engagement exercises took place three times over a 12-month period utilising surveys that were designed to capture residents' concerns and ideas. This information was subsequently used to measure the impact of the intervention. Some of the solutions laid out in the POP Plan arose directly from the citizen engagement exercises. For example, people said they were fearful of coming forward with information about suspected offenders and so the Authority worked with North Wales Police to establish a new telephone line so they could report their suspicions anonymously.
- 13 Relative to the Caia Park intervention, the StayWise Cymru project is in its infancy. In developing the StayWise education package the Authority is aiming to ensure that teachers communicate key safety messages to younger generations on its behalf as part of an integrated curriculum, to increase awareness of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Working with the other Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales the Authority has identified some of those who it will need to involve in

¹ [Pentre Gwyn Youth Club Caia Park](#) – YouTube

shaping the end product. The cartoon character created for StayWise Cymru – ‘Sbarc’ – has been market-tested with school children, and some senior educationalists have been given opportunities to be involved in shaping the teaching platform. The Authority is considering options around securing supply teachers and support staff in order to enable front line teaching staff to attend StayWise development workshops.

- 14 Overall, despite some consideration of who needs to be engaged and consulted in the two areas reviewed, the Authority has adopted a mostly project-by-project approach. Consequently, it has not yet embedded involvement strategically as a corporate way of working. The Act requires relevant bodies to consider how best to involve the full diversity of their local population, including those who may be hard to reach. Across a large and diverse region such as North Wales there will always be differences in how and who to involve in different communities and in relation to different issues.
- 15 The Authority’s current approach to involvement means it has not strategically identified and mapped who its key stakeholders are. In Caia Park, there was a recognition that children and young people outside of mainstream education were hard to reach via normal methods of communication, and barriers have been identified in engaging front line teachers in developing StayWise Cymru. Such examples were not guided by a central approach in identifying community groups who may struggle to be involved in the Authority’s work without additional consideration or tailored engagement methods. Without this, individual projects and work areas risk having involvement ‘blind spots’. For example, we found limited consideration given to involving groups such as Gypsies and Travellers or other minority communities (for instance, the large Polish community living on Caia Park estate).
- 16 Officers acknowledge that the Authority is more comfortable involving other public bodies and third sector partners in its work, less so members of the public, and it is yet to overcome the challenge of involving the full diversity of the population as required by the Act. Making the shift from collaborating with other service providers to truly involving the full range of stakeholders, including citizens, will help the Authority to meet the requirements of the Act. The Communications team’s work with the Consultation Institute on engaging with hard to reach groups can give the Authority a better understanding of how to involve the full diversity of its stakeholders and a platform from which to move towards genuine involvement as defined by the Act.
- 17 There is some consideration by the Authority to who delivers messages to communities – eg partner organisations and youth workers were used in Caia Park due to their trusted status, and more generally, trusted community fire fighters are often used when carrying out ‘hot strikes’ (the delivery of home safety messages to a local and receptive audience following nearby fire incidents). Mapping all stakeholders will enable the Authority to have a more systematic approach to identifying the most effective method of involving particular groups or communities in different circumstances.

- 18 Involvement as defined under WFG is not a core skill necessarily associated with the traditional fire fighter role and the Authority faces a challenge to upskill its workforce in this regard. The Authority is responding positively to this challenge – engagement skills are a core competency in its new apprenticeship programmes and its Young Leaders programme, and it is also integrating these skills into staff objectives and future development initiatives. Elected Members and some managers are receiving media training, in order to better communicate and influence opinion formers. The Authority’s approach to the Welsh language is commendable, with all staff required to have the ability to communicate at level 2 or above.

Involvement activity is mostly used to react to problems and is yet to become a strategic asset that helps drive improvement

- 19 Because of the increasing importance of prevention and widening roles to go beyond emergency response, Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales have an opportunity to ensure citizens are increasingly involved in shaping and influencing their work. As described above, there are challenges to overcome in identifying who to involve and how to involve them, not least in areas such as road safety. Currently, the Authority is not actively promoting safety messages to people beyond the North Wales area, despite road users in the region coming from many areas across Wales, England and beyond.
- 20 Positively, we found that the Authority has a strong culture of being ‘problem-solvers’ – according to officers the Authority rarely says ‘no’ when asked to do things. Whilst this is a clear organisational strength, it may limit capacity, which may explain why the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working are yet to be fully embedded in all aspects of the Authority’s work. Our fieldwork found that there is more work to be done to embed these behaviours and culture. Mainstreaming involvement requires effective prioritisation, sustained buy-in and leadership from across the Authority.
- 21 The Authority often involves stakeholders when it is faced with an immediate problem that needs solving. For example, engaging residents in Caia Park to shape the interventions to reduce arson was in direct response to the increasing number of vehicle fires on the estate. Whilst the engagement was effective, once the immediate problem is solved, the engagement work is largely discontinued. In another example, the Authority engaged directors of finance in the six North Wales local authorities in order to improve their understanding and appreciation of the funding provided to the Fire and Rescue Authority, prior to discussion with local councillors. Whilst these are positive activities, we found no examples of proactive, continued involvement aimed at connecting with stakeholders at the earliest possible opportunity to give them the best chance of shaping and influencing the Authority’s work.

- 22 The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (the Commissioner) defines prevention as ‘working in partnership to co-produce the best outcomes possible, utilising the strengths and assets people and places have to contribute’.
- The Commissioner has broken down preventative activities into four different levels:
- primary prevention – building resilience: creating the conditions in which problems do not arise in the future. A universal approach.
 - secondary prevention: targeting action towards areas where there is a high risk of a problem occurring. A targeted approach, which cements the principles of progressive universalism (a determination to provide support for all, giving everyone and everything a voice and vested interest, but recognises more support will be required by those people or areas with greater needs).
 - tertiary prevention: intervening once there is a problem, to stop it getting worse and prevent it reoccurring in the future. An intervention approach.
 - acute spending: spending, which acts to manage the impact of a strongly negative situation but does little or nothing to prevent problems occurring in the future².
- 23 Using these criteria, we have categorised the StayWise Cymru initiative (which is focused on increasing awareness of how to lead safe and healthy lives amongst younger generations) as primary prevention. Our review found, however, that there is limited genuine involvement in the project to date – in the process of adapting the English StayWise platform for a Welsh audience the external engagement and consultation has mainly focused on senior educationalists.
- 24 The involvement examples we reviewed are mostly related to tertiary prevention activities. This is especially relevant to the Arson Reduction Team’s preventative involvement work in Caia Park, Wrexham. Despite its positive work, the team operates on annual contracts which is impacting negatively on staff. Likewise, the preventative activities of the Phoenix initiative – a project to educate 13-17-year olds about the importance of fire safety and the consequences of deliberate fires and hoax calls – are not core funded. Addressing the challenge of short-term grant funded programmes is not easy. It requires Welsh Government shifting annual grant funding to core funding or the Authority mainstreaming Arson Reduction activities to operate in line with the other Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales.
- 25 Mapping stakeholders, identifying those who are hard to reach, and involving people on a proactive and on-going basis will help the Authority to identify and capitalise on more opportunities to hear and listen to what people have to say. For example, the Authority aims to carry out 20,000 Safe and Well visits every year, but limits this to disseminating information and is not using these valuable face-to-face interactions to ask for people’s views about services. Meanwhile,

² [Budget process and preventative spend, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales website](#)

traditional document-focused consultations continue to be undertaken – for example, the Authority’s long-term Environmental Strategy (September 2019) which received just 24 responses.

- 26 Positively, the Authority is evaluating some of its involvement activity and is therefore able to learn what works to scale up and mainstream this activity. The POP Plan produced for Caia Park reflects the early consideration given to ensure the inclusion of measurable indicators on how safe the community felt prior to and after the intervention. As a result, the Authority can capture and apply lessons learnt in other areas where there are similar issues, such as Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Proposals for improvement

27 Rather than list proposals for improvement we have produced a self-assessment for the Authority’s staff and members to use in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of its current approach to involvement. This self-assessment can be used at both a corporate strategic level but also on individual projects to judge how well the Authority is doing and where change is needed to ensure involvement is mainstreamed and made sustainable. We expect the Authority to use this tool to evaluate its current performance and to identify how it can improve its work.

Exhibit 3: self-assessment

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We have a strategic approach and corporate framework for involvement which directs activity			
We understand who needs to be involved and why			
We prioritise the space, time and resources for meaningful involvement			
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence our policies and plans			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence how we design and deliver services			
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement will help improve their lives			
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement with us will result in change happening			
We explain the impact involvement has had on our decisions, policies and services			
We tailor our approach to involvement to ensure all citizens and partners can take part			
We use the findings from involvement activity to shape and improve policy and decision making			
We can demonstrate that our approach to involvement saves money and avoids duplication with the similar activities carried out by our partners			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
Our approach to involvement allows our partners to hold us to account for the decisions we make			
Our approach to involvement allows citizens to hold us to account for the decisions we make			
Our approach to involvement is enjoyable and worthwhile			
Our approach to involvement helps us to integrate our work to avoid silos			
We use the outcome of our involvement to work co-productively to design and deliver services			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to learn what works			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to identify what needs to improve			

Appendix 1

Examples of involvement approaches in UK Fire and Rescue Authorities

Other fire and rescue authorities in the UK are involving their stakeholders strategically and where this works well, they tend to do this regularly and collaboratively.

In 2019 the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service published an independent analysis of the responses to the 'Your Service, Your Voice' consultation³ about the transformation of the service and closer operational integration with the Scottish Ambulance Service. Overall the exercise generated 1563 responses, the majority of which were from individuals, plus 32 public service partners, and 85 other organisations. Methods included a well-planned series of 'warm up' public information exercises explaining what the service does and how the public will benefit from change. Three years' worth of consultation findings and complaints were also reviewed to find any trends. Consideration of people living in different areas and with protected characteristics was also considered, and representative groups were involved at early stage to design the exercise. A key finding is that a sustained focus on prevention is the best way of protecting individuals. However, the exercise also finds that whilst staff are open to change, the public are more sceptical and see proposals as propping up shortfalls in other public services.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority conducts regular engagement activity rather than 'one off' set piece consultations. An annual calendar of engagement activity is shared with partners and activity is co-ordinated and integrated with others where possible. Ideas and proposals are regularly tested through the Authority's Online forum and in dedicated community safety sessions of the county council led Citizen panel. All 'Ask the Fire Authority' sessions, open days, and roadshows in the area have a theme based on a corporate objective and results are reviewed independently by a regional reference panel of experts, plus the local Police and Crime Commissioner. Regular surveys are carried out on themes rather than policies. A series of Consultation Principles are set out on the Authorities website, see [getting-involved](#).

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority regularly engages with its communities to give them the opportunity to say what they want from the Authority. West Yorkshire engages early before they develop plans, sharing data and intelligence with partners on designing involvement activity. The Authority also targets underrepresented groups such Travellers, and its involvement work is integrated into its inclusion and diversity activity. The Authority carries out regular online surveys and evaluations on the quality of service; satisfaction, complaints; school visits; Safe & Well visits; and changes to fire cover. The Authority finds that people may not know enough about the wider role of the fire and rescue service. This makes it difficult for stakeholders to comment about something they know little about. In response the Authority has produced an interactive online guide and video about the services provided by the Authority.

See [CustomerServiceGuide](#). Results of public consultation and what changes as a result is published online

³ See [your-service-your-voice](#)



Audit Wales

24 Cathedral Road

Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: info@audit.wales

Website: www.audit.wales

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.
Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.