

Local Authority Social Services Annual Report (Director's Report)

Guidance

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance will help local authorities prepare their annual social services reports. It replaces guidance issued in 2017 by the Welsh Government and the Association of the Directors of Social Services Cymru. The revised guidance reflects developments since the original guidance was issued, and feedback from local authorities and stakeholders.
- 1.2 The guidance:
- explains the requirements for the annual report.
 - reflects the Welsh Government's intention to work with local authorities and Care Inspectorate Wales to integrate the annual social services report into the new Performance Improvement Framework. The annual report "*will then be the overall mechanism that local authorities will use to demonstrate performance....*"
 - outlines the target audiences for the report and provides the option for a separate report in a form more suitable for the public; and
 - provides suggestions for good practice
- 1.3 Subject to revision of the codes and regulations, this guidance takes effect from the end of the 2023-24 reporting year. Therefore, reports published in 2025 onwards will use this new guidance. All reports published in 2024, about 2023-24 will use the previous guidance. It is issued to local authorities in advance to allow arrangements to be made to meet the new requirements. The guidance is advisory but refers to legal requirements for the publication of the annual social services report, most notably section 144A of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and prescribed regulations..

Key features

- 1.4 The annual report and the reporting process will now be:
- (i) Part of the Performance Improvement Framework.
 - (ii) Integral to local authorities' own social services planning, scrutiny, and performance improvement actions.
 - (iii) Grounded in a rigorous self-assessment of performance, which includes:
 - a) what has been achieved and done well.
 - b) what improvements are needed, informed by feedback from the public, service-users, providers, partners, and other stakeholders.
 - c) action planned and taken to achieve identified improvement needs; and
 - d) progress made against improvement priorities identified the previous year
- 1.5 There are three appendices:
- Appendix A: Template for the content of the report

- Appendix B: Statutory requirements relating to the report
- Appendix C: Good practice notes for reporting to the public

2. Legal and policy context

2.1 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (“the 2014 Act”) requires local authorities, health boards and the Welsh Ministers to promote the well-being of people who need care and support and carers who need support.

2.2 The Act seeks to ensure:

- People have control over what support they need, making decisions about their support as an equal partner.
- There is proportionate assessment that focuses on the individual.
- Carers have an equal right to an assessment for support to those they care for.
- Easy access to information and advice is available to all.
- Arrangements to safeguard people are stronger.
- A preventative approach to care and support needs.
- Local authorities and health boards work in partnership to drive integration, innovation and service change including new forms of provision.

2.3 The Act is clear about the need for local government ownership of changes required by the 2014 Act so that the *“benefits of locating social services within local government are maximised and are part of local government’s corporate responsibility for promoting well-being, social inclusion and community safety”*.

Legal requirements for the Annual Social Services Report

2.4 The legal requirements for the annual social services report are set out in the 2014 Act, codes made under the Act, and regulations. More detailed information is provided in Appendix B of this guidance.

2.5 Section 144A of the 2014 Act requires that, *as soon as reasonably practicable* after the end of the relevant financial year, a local authority must publish a report on the exercise of its social services functions. The report must:

- contain the information set out in codes and any regulations made under the 2014 Act.
- be presented to the Council by the Director of Social Services.
- be copied to the Welsh Ministers, which includes Care Inspectorate Wales.
- be published on the Council’s website.

2.6 Throughout the guidance, this report, required by statute, is termed the **“section 144A report”** to distinguish it from any optional separate report produced for the public and the corporate self-assessment report required under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (the “2021 Act”).

Performance Improvement Framework

2.7 The Welsh Government considers that the annual reporting process for social services is now part of the new Performance Improvement Framework. This is a code made under section 145 of the 2014 Act on the exercise of social services functions. Its provisions are therefore mandatory. It replaces the *“Code of Practice in Relation to Measuring Social Services Performance”* issued in 2016 and its associated technical guidance. This more comprehensive framework reflects an ambition to review data

requirements for social services to ensure they are fit for purpose and reflect the impact of the 2014 Act. [Social Services and Well-Being Act 2014](#)

2.8 The purpose of the Framework is to:

- Ensure there is a clear nationally understood approach to inform performance and improvement
- Inform the content and structure of the section 144A report.
- Enable practitioners to understand the use of evidence to support and improve practice and to ensure staff are appropriately skilled and qualified.
- Enable local authorities to understand how the Welsh Government will hold them to account.
- Ensure local authorities are working to the same high standards.

2.9 The foundations for the new framework are 8 high-level quality standards under four headings:

- 1. People**
- 2. Prevention**
- 3. Partnerships and integration**
- 4. Well-being**

2.10 The headings provide a structure for the regular reporting of agreed performance metrics. The Framework says:

“the high-level quality standards are intended to be aspirational, not a check list to be met” and that they are “designed to challenge local authorities, to raise ambition and to encourage innovation”. They aim to ensure that people who need care and support and carers who need support “are able to access the right support at the right time from the right place and that there are appropriately experienced and/or qualified professionals in place to deliver this”

2.11 The following table lists the eight high-level quality standards under the four main headings:

Table 1: Performance Improvement Framework - High-level quality standards

People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them</i> • <i>Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision.</i>
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn develop and participate in society</i>
Partnership and integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people</i> • <i>People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners</i>
Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm</i> • <i>People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible</i>

2.12 The Framework requires local authorities to demonstrate progress against the quality standards through the section 144A report **and** that they are using evidence and research to support their service provision and improvements.

2.13 The quality standards align with Care Inspectorate Wales' Code of Practice for the review of local authority social services. They are also linked to the seven well-being goals in Section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

2.14 The Welsh Government has produced three supporting documents to assist local authorities in capturing and using performance information and data:

Measuring activity and performance guidance

2.15 This guidance explains how local authorities should collect data and evidence. It also sets out a framework of metrics covering adults, children, and carers, which must be collected and submitted to Welsh Government together with anonymised person-level data and aggregated data on specific aspects of social care. It states local authorities should also gather their own data to understand better how the local delivery of social care is working according to local priorities. [Measuring social services performance: code of practice | GOV.WALES](#)

2.16 The data will be used to:

- Better understand local services and the people who use them
- Provide a consistent baseline against which to analyse activity and assess compliance and improvement against the requirements of the 2014 Act.
- Inform policy evaluations at the national level
- Inform Care Inspectorate Wales' reviews of performance of local authorities and any national thematic reviews.
- Inform Social Care Wales in its role of supporting improvements in the sector.

- Inform other local authorities and statutory partners to help promote collaboration

2.17 The data is reported separately to Welsh Government but should be cited where appropriate in the self-assessment part of the section 144A report. See Appendix A

Understanding experiences and outcomes

2.18 This provides practical ideas to help local authorities understand the experiences and outcomes of those who use social services. It describes ways of engaging people and some of the tools and methodologies which are being used around Wales including: Developing Evidence Enriched Practice, Results Based Accountability, Brights Spots (survey for looked after children), and Person-Centred Community Care Inventory. It contains advice on creating survey tools, including digital surveys; a template for outcome-focussed case studies; advice about managing research activities involving engagement with people including sampling, ethical considerations, safeguarding and the law concerning the use of personal data.

[Understanding experiences and outcomes of the Social Services Performance and Improvement Framework | GOV.WALES](#)

Using evidence to inform improvement

2.19 This guidance provides practical ideas and advice about how evidence can be used to inform social services at local, regional, and national levels. It includes advice on understanding and using evidence, collecting, and analysing evidence, and ensuring evidence is used consistently and sustainably. Social Care Wales and the Social Care Institute for Excellence have also published a report "*Using Evidence in Social Services and Social Care in Wales*"

[Performance and Improvement Framework for Social Services: using evidence to inform improvement | GOV.WALES](#)

[Using evidence in social services and social care in Wales | SCIE](#)

3. Annual Social Services Report

Purpose of the report

- 3.1 The Performance and Improvement Framework describes the purpose of the section 144A report as being to:
- set out a local authority's improvement journey in providing services to people who access information, advice and assistance and individuals receiving care and support and carers receiving support.
 - use information obtained from the new framework and other sources to demonstrate how local authorities have promoted well-being and accounted for the delivery of quality standards.
 - evidence progress against the eight quality standards, and to inform decisions on how to respond from the perspective of the social services function at a corporate, organisational level.
 - Evidence how the standards and principles in the National Framework for Commissioning Care and Support are making a contribution to meeting the needs of people receiving care and support from social services and improving well-being outcomes.
 - enable the Welsh Government to collate, analyse and understand data and evidence on the delivery of care, and support for carers across Wales.

Self-assessment

- 3.2 Sections 89-91 of the 2021 Act place new duties on local authorities to keep their performance under review, to consult local people and others on the performance and to report annually on performance in a "self-assessment report".
- 3.3 The Welsh Government has produced guidance on these new duties [Performance and governance of local authorities: statutory guidance | GOV.WALES](#). The guidance defines self-assessment as:
- "a corporate, organisational assessment rather than an assessment of individual services". It also says that this corporate self-assessment process "will not require councils to look again in detail at the social services function"*
- 3.4 The self-assessment for the section 144A report is intended to mirror the self-assessment principles of the report produced under the 2021 Act, but at a service rather than a corporate level.
- 3.5 Self-assessment for social services requires the local authority to ask itself and answer the questions set out in Appendix A in the context of the Framework's eight high-level quality standards.
- 3.6 To be effective, the self-assessment should be:
- Integrated in the way the authority monitors, reviews, and reports its performance in social services, and not a stand-alone process.

- Considered integral to performance systems, not an exercise in compliance.
 - Open, honest, balanced, and objective about achievements and challenges
 - Focussed on outcomes, the effects on people’s lives and experiences not descriptions of process
 - Grounded in good evidence using qualitative and quantitative information from a variety of sources including bespoke research.
- 3.7 The annual reporting process should be a year-round one integral to a local authority’s business planning, review, monitoring and performance improvement arrangements. Local authorities are best placed to decide how this is achieved considering their own systems and corporate performance management arrangements and how findings from this annual reporting process can inform any cross-cutting themes for the 2021 Act corporate self-assessment.

Timescale for publication

- 3.8 The 2014 Act says that the report should be published as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the financial year. If information for the report is collected over the course of whole year, then depending on the local authority’s own processes for signing off the report, it should be possible to publish the report by the end of September. In normal circumstances, it should not be produced any later.

Target audiences

- 3.9 The Framework says:

“Welsh Government will use evidence gathered through the Code to understand the impact local authorities’ social services are having at national, regional and local level. The aim is for evidence to be used at all levels of the social care system – individuals (e.g. social workers and occupational therapists), by local authorities, at the regional levels (e.g. Regional Partnership Boards), and at the national level i.e. Welsh Government, to inform and sustain continuous and consistent improvement, and strength-based practice”.

- 3.10 The **Welsh Government** intends to use evidence from the reporting process to understand the effectiveness of national policy, to inform future policy development, and to ensure continuous improvement in all parts of Wales.
- 3.11 **Care Inspectorate Wales** will use the evidence to inform its performance review activity.
- 3.12 **Social Care Wales** will draw from the reports in their key roles in supporting practitioners, local authorities, and the wider care sector to understand and use data effectively and supporting service improvement.
- 3.13 For **members of the public**, local authorities may, if they wish, publish a separate report in a more appropriate format and style. The form and content of that report should be determined locally in the light of local needs and preferences. This might be a wholly separate report or a plain- language summary report which used as an

opening chapter of the section 144A report that can also be published separately.
Good practice notes for reporting to the public are provided in Appendix C.

Appendix A: Template for the content of the section 144A report

A1 The structure of the report should follow the order of the underlined headings set out below and make use of the guidance supporting the Performance Improvement Framework.

Director's summary

A2 An overview of performance in a form which could be used in a separate version of the report produced for the public.

Context section

A3 A factual section setting out how the service operates and covering the following elements.

- **Leadership:** A short narrative explaining how the local authority's political leadership, governance, scrutiny, and challenge arrangements help to set priorities and promote well-being across the local authority's functions.
- **Workforce:** Information on the social care workforce, recruitment and retention covering directly provided and commissioned services highlighting challenges and any solutions in place to address them and how staff are supported and developed in their professional roles.
- **Financial resources** Budget information by service areas for the reporting year and comparison with the previous year.

A4 The information need only be brief statements highlighting any significant change since the previous year. It is acceptable to refer to separate published documents if a reference or electronic link is provided.

Performance assessment section

A5 This section should report against each of the four areas in the Performance Improvement Framework – People; Prevention; Partnership and Integration; Well-being. In each of them, the commentary should answer four self-assessment questions:

1. **What do we know about the quality and impact of what we are doing?**
2. **How do we know? e.g. what evidence from research, engagement and the metrics are we using to inform this assessment?**
3. **What are we doing well and how can we do better? What are our priorities for improvement particularly over the coming year**
4. **What progress did we make on the areas for improvement identified in last year's report? What difference did we make?**

A6 The self-assessment should be evaluative, drawing on qualitative and quantitative evidence. The emphasis should be on self-assessment and not just a description of what is provided. Evidence from a range of sources can be used e.g. operational

performance data, research, surveys, engagement events, consultations and citizens' panels. Where any of the metrics set out in the Measuring Activity and Performance Guidance are cited, sufficient context should be provided e.g. is it an improving trend?

- A7 Some material might well relate to more than one of the four quality standard headings below. Where this applies, local authorities should include the material under the heading considered most appropriate. Where necessary, cross-referencing should be used to avoid repetition in different sections.

People

- A8 Quality standards:

- *“All people are equal partners who have choice, voice and control over their lives and are able to achieve what matters to them”*
- *“Effective leadership is evident at all levels with a highly skilled well qualified and supported workforce working towards a shared vision”.*

- A9 This should explain how the local authority is exercising its functions under Parts 3 (Assessing the Needs of Individuals) and Part 4 (Meeting Needs) and, where appropriate, (Part 10 Advocacy) of the 2014 Act including:

- Ensuring that people are at the centre of services and communities.
- People have a strong voice and control over what they receive (with advocacy where appropriate) and the views of service users and carers are reflected in the authority's assessment of its performance.
- How people are shaping the services they receive.
- The focus is on what matters to them, the outcomes they wish to achieve and how they can use their own strengths and resources to help promote their own well-being.
- Practitioners and managers ensure that practice and supervision are grounded in up-to-date knowledge and evidence-based practice.
- The social services function is well-led and supported at a service, corporate and political level.
- Welsh language: progress in the context of More than just words Five Year Plan 2022-27 and the Active Offer.

Prevention

- A10 Quality standards:

- *“The need for care and support is minimised and the escalation of need is prevented whilst ensuring that the best outcomes for people are achieved”*
- *“Resilience within communities is promoted and people are supported to fulfil their potential by actively supporting people who need care and/or support including carers to learn develop and participate in society”*

- A11 This should explain:

- The use of preventative and integrated approaches, ensuring the right care and support is there at the right time to delay or avoid the escalation of need.

- How services and outcomes are proportionate, targeted, and sustainable, and supported through the promotion of social enterprises, co-operatives, user-led services and the third sector.

A12 Preventative activity can include wide-scale measures aimed at the wider population as well as targeted interventions for individuals

Partnership and integration

A13 Quality standards:

- *“Effective partnerships are in place to commission and fully deliver fully integrated, high quality sustainable outcomes for people”*
- *“People are encouraged to be involved in the design and delivery of their care and support as equal partners”*

A14 This should explain:

- How well the local authority and its health board(s) are collaborating to identify needs and develop integrated population assessment reports to underpin the shaping and commissioning of sustainable services.
- How well the authority has supported collaboration and partnership including with other local authorities, the third sector and providers.

A15 Where appropriate, the report should refer to other reports such as those of regional partnership boards, population needs assessments and area plans and reflect on regional and partnership plans.

Well-being

A16 Quality standards

- *“People are protected and safeguarded from abuse and neglect and any other types of harm”*
- *“People are supported to actively manage their well-being and make their own decisions so that they are able to achieve their full potential and live independently for as long as possible”*

A17 This part of the report should explain how well the local authority has:

- Exercised its social services and allied functions to make a positive contribution to the well-being of people needing care and support and carers needing support, respecting their culture, beliefs and other personal characteristics, and respecting their wishes and feelings
- Built upon people’s personal circumstances, capabilities, networks and local communities
- Worked with people to develop creative solutions
- Put effective safeguarding arrangements in place

A18 “Neglect” includes activity to prevent serious self-neglect.

A19 Local authorities can refer and provide a link to the reports of regional safeguarding boards and other agencies for more detail where appropriate.

A20 Well-being for adults and children is defined in Part 2 of the 2014 Act and in more detail in the National Outcomes Framework [[Social Services Nation Outcome](#)]

[Framework](#)]. Councils are no longer required to report separately against each of the 6 well-being quality outcomes featured in the National Outcomes Framework.

Other information section

A21 These are matters to be reported on which do not necessarily fit just one of the quality standards.

Inspections and reviews

A22 If, within the reporting year, Care Inspectorate Wales has reported on the Council's social services functions, the main points should be included. Any improvements made by the Council or planned in response to the inspection report should be highlighted. It is good practice to reference and provide a link to the full inspection report on the Care Inspectorate Wales' website.

A23 The authority should also include in its self-assessment and priorities for improvement how it proposes to act on any relevant findings and recommendations from CIW's periodic thematic reviews and any relevant reports by Audit Wales, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales or the Older People's and Children's Commissioners. It is acceptable to make a brief reference here and direct the reader to another document for more detail.

Complaints and representations

A24 What matters most is not the statistics, but any discernible trends and what changes and improvements the authority has made, or proposes to make, in response to complaints and investigations. For numbers of complaints, it is acceptable to refer and provide a link to the Council's corporate annual complaints report for more detail if statistics for social services complaints are disaggregated.

A25 Complaints and representations include any received from the Citizen Voice Body established under the Health and Social Care (Quality and Engagement) (Wales) Act 2020.

Referencing other sources of information

A26 What is effectively an overview report cannot cover every aspect of all a local authority is doing in its social services and allied functions. The commentary can explain that because an area has not been chosen as a priority objective does not mean that nothing is happening elsewhere. The reader can be directed to other reports such as service level, corporate plans and supporting business plans if they require more information. Good practice is to include a reference and an electronic link where any other document in the public domain can be found.

Appendix B: Legal requirements for the Annual Social Services Report

- B1 Section 144A(1) of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 requires local authorities to prepare and publish an annual report about the exercise of their social services functions as soon as reasonably practical after the end of the financial year to which it relates.
- B2 Section 144A(2) of the 2014 Act says the report must include:
- (a) details of how the authority has exercised its social services functions during the financial year, including details of the extent to which the authority has—
 - (i) acted in accordance with requirements imposed on local authorities by a code issued under section 9 (codes to help achieve outcomes in relation to well-being),
 - (ii) acted in accordance with any relevant requirements contained in a code issued under section 145 (codes about the exercise of social services functions), and
 - (iii) had regard to any relevant guidelines in a code issued under section 145, and
 - (b) such other information as may be prescribed by regulations.
- B3 Section 144A(3) states that the details provided under subsection (2)(a)(ii) must state how the authority has satisfied any requirements contained in a code relating to assessing the needs of an individual in accordance with Part 3 and meeting needs under Part 4.
- B4 Subsections 144A (4) and (5) require that the annual report must be in such form as may be prescribed by regulations and a copy of the published report must be sent to the Welsh Ministers.
- B5 Taking each of the requirements listed in paragraph B2 in turn:

S144A(a)(ii)

Codes made under Section 145 of the 2014 Act which relate in some way to the Section 144A report include:

- Part 2 (General Functions) covers partnership arrangements, well-being, and overarching duties
- National Outcomes Framework
- The Performance Improvement Framework and associated guidance
- Part 3 Code (Assessing Needs)
- Part 4 Code (Meeting Needs)

Part 8 Code on the role of the Director of Social Services

Paragraphs 81-90 of the Part 8 Code set out various requirements for the S144A report. The Director must prepare and publish an annual report about the exercise of the council's functions as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the financial year.

The report must:

- Be presented to the Council by the Director of Social Services and copied to the Welsh Minsters
- Evaluate the performance of the local authority in the delivery of its social services functions
- Set out how the local authority has achieved the eight quality standards for well-being set out in a Code made under Part 2 of the 2014 Act and has:
 - promoted the well-being of people needing care and support and carers needing support in the Population Assessment Report for the local authority area
 - assessed and met needs in accordance with Codes made under Parts 3 and 4 of the 2014 Act
- Provide assurances on:
 - Structural arrangements that provide good governance and strong accountability
 - Effective partnership working through regional partnership boards
 - Performance in handling complaints and representations
 - A response to any inspection(s) undertaken in the year
 - An update on the Implementation of “More than Just Words”
 - Explain how the local authority has engaged with people in the production of the annual report

Local Authority Social Services Annual Reporting (Prescribed Form)(Wales)
(Amendment) Regulations 2023

Regulations prescribed under the 2014 Act set out the specific information that must be included by local authorities in the s144A report and headings under which the information that is required must be included. The structure for the report provided within the prescribed regulations has been outlined at Appendix A of this guidance.

Appendix C: Good practice in reporting to the public

- C1 Local authorities have considerable experience in producing publications and will wish to draw on this if they produce a separate social services report for the public. The following points were distilled from good practice identified in a review of social services annual reports for 2020-21 and a broader review of available literature
- C2 The report should reflect what matters to the public and the information they need, which can be ascertained from the views of representative organisations, focus groups, engagement events, complaints, and other representations.
- C3 The most important information to the public is often about what services are available, who is eligible for support, how to access it, how long it will take to arrange, and whether there will be a charge for care and support. This may not be suitable for an annual performance report, but the report can direct the reader to where such information can be found and other sources of help and information. Where appropriate, it should also refer to other relevant reports e.g. the section 144A report, and reports of the Regional Partnership Board and the Regional Safeguarding Board.
- C4 Style is for local judgment, but a public-facing document needs to be in plain every day, language and jargon-free. Many terms in everyday use in social services and the local authority may be unfamiliar to the public and will also need to be explained.
- C5 The report should be concise. People may not be inclined, or have the time, to read a long report. Too much content can obscure key performance and improvement messages.
- C6 Acronyms should be avoided. If considered necessary, acronyms should be spelt out in full on the first use, and their meaning explained in full in plain language in the text or in a glossary.
- C7 Not everyone with an interest in social services performance can access the internet.
- C8 Existing practices of having a range of formats e.g. large print; easy-read, and short video stories are encouraged. The latter can bring a report to life and can be an effective form of communication.
- C9 The report should be easy to find on the local authority's website, and web-based versions of the report should be easy for the reader to navigate.
- C10 Effective design, including the use of colour, charts, and illustrations, helps readers grasp the key facts and understand performance data.
- C11 Anonymised case studies and comments or quotes from the public describing their experience can highlight lived experience.
