

Consultation on Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

From Denbighshire County Council

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1. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications.

There is awareness and understanding of the Well-being of Future Generations Act within the organisation. Ahead of – and during - the Act's implementation there were Council Briefings, Officer briefings, and internal comms about the Act's goals and its Sustainable Development Principles. There was also a wholesale review of the organisation's planning, assurance and decision-making frameworks, so the Act is embedded into the 'engine' of the Council (including our induction process). It would be interesting to gauge the general public's awareness of the Act, and the ethos of making decisions today that don't negatively impact on the ability of future generations to achieve well-being.

The Public Services Board is a statutory vehicle of the Act, and it would not be unexpected if our residents were unfamiliar with this vehicle.

2. The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed.

Focussing on the resources available from Welsh Government, the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG) team has been effective in the support provided. Frequent network meetings with thoughtfully curated agendas have been timely, and the content and format has been both topical and conducive to good discussion.

The grant provided from Welsh Government has been less effective. Firstly, the fact that it needs to be spent regionally doesn't allow for local needs to be met. Importantly though, the issue has been the criteria for the grant's spend, which hasn't felt reflective of the PSB's priority activities. For example, following publication of the well-being assessments and agreement of priorities, the grant criteria continued to include 'addressing gaps in evidence base' or 'creation of live assessments' when PSB's focus has been on designing and delivering next steps. The grant has usually, therefore, proved difficult to spend. However, 2021-22 will see many well-being assessments being revisited, so for the next financial year this grant will be of great importance.

The above responses do refer to PSBs, and it feels that the WG's focus on the Act is on PSBs. However, this does not feel like the priority 'vehicle' to our organisation. Our PSB has struggled to find a niche for itself, perhaps as many of the priority well-being themes it identified already have regional partnership structures in place to address them, i.e. mental health. The planned Local Government Bill that legislates for CJsCs – regional boards managing various core themes - may further hinder the PSB to carve out a distinct role for itself.

For Denbighshire County Council, it's within our organisation's own well-being plan (and business as usual) that commit to the Act is most keenly manifest. Therefore support to public bodies should be of more importance than it currently appears to be, in comparison with collaborative bodies. It's through these bodies that the Act is having greatest impact, from our perspective.

In a discussion regarding resources available to support the implementation of this Act, it's important to note the substantially higher level of funding that's been available to Regional

Partnership Boards under the Social Services & Well-being Act. Members of that board reported that when resource was allocated to them, and when the terms of receipt of the resources enabled delivery, it became easier for the board to progress business.

3. Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner.

Although staff we work with at the WFG Commissioner's office are personable and professional, their contact is sporadic, there is little consistency in terms of the people we work with, and relationships aren't forged at senior levels of the organisation. Customer relationship management and the critical friend-type connection that would be useful (and that we share with Audit Wales, for example) could be greatly improved if there was greater dialogue. By way of example, reports received from the Commissioner's office are often excessively long (the recent annual report was 800 pages); aren't bespoke; and recommendations made haven't been discussed and therefore betray limited understanding of the geographic, financial, and strategic considerations of our organisation. There is scope for a more effective offer from the WFG Commissioner's office that could support continuous improvement.

4. The leadership role of the Welsh Government.

We believe there to be a systemic governance issue that is a barrier to the effectiveness of PSBs, and that is the fact that the timetables for publishing local authority well-being plans and PSB well-being plans were not synchronised. As the timetable for publishing each is set out in statute, there was no flexibility around time scales. In our local authority, we'd therefore developed our organisation's plan (along with its associated delivery plan, targets, milestones, and financial strategy) prior to the PSB agreeing its priorities. This presented issues on two key fronts: It made it difficult to 'retro fit' and establish synergy with the priorities set by PSB members, and it felt excessive and confusing to return to our staff and stakeholders for input as to the what the priorities and delivery steps should be. We believe it would be far more effective (and that it would cause less confusion) if the PSB plan and local authority plans were produced at least at the same time. WG can help with this by rewriting the requirements for publication deadlines. As the bodies that are most numerous in Wales, and as bodies that are democratically led, it would be useful synchronise PSB well-being plan publication deadlines with local authority election cycles.

5. Any other barriers to successful implementation of the Act (e.g. Brexit, COVID, etc.).

Brexit and covid are challenges that will shape the socioeconomic fabric of our communities, so will have great impact. On the face of it, this shouldn't be a barrier to successful implementation of the Act but we should be aware that the process of updating Local Assessments of Well-being will largely start from early 2021, when the impact of these challenges on Wales and the UK will still be manifesting. Their impact won't be complete, therefore the Assessments could require more change/edits/captures of nuance than they would usually do. This might present extra pressure.

In times of change and pressure it can be typical human behaviour to deal with immediate concerns, so there is a risk that there will be a tendency to emphasise short-term over long-term planning during the next planning cycle. Perhaps Audit Wales and the WFG Commissioner's office can help to mitigate this to some extent through the advice they provide.

6. How to ensure that the Act is implemented successfully in the future.

- i. Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner's office to establish closer advisory relationships with senior management in organisations, possibly by working in collaboration with Audit Wales. Particular focus could be on refining approaches to sustainable development.
- ii. Better align legislative timetable for PSB and Public Bodies' well-being plans, so that the timetable is more conducive to better governance (i.e. establishing a 'golden thread' from PSB work).
- iii. Develop grant criteria in a co-production style with PSB coordinators in order to ensure that funds made available are relevant and can effectively support progress.