
Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol | Equality and Social Justice Committee

Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Chwaraeon Cymru | Evidence from: Welsh Sports Association

Post Legislative Scrutiny of the Future Generations Act

Introduction

The Welsh Sports Association (WSA) is the independent membership body for the sport and leisure industry in Wales, charged with the task of providing leadership, advocacy and a gateway to business & governance services for the sector.

The WSA understand the 'sport & leisure industry' to mean anyone involved in the business of sport and leisure in Wales.

As the collective voice for this sector in proactively advocating and influencing key decision makers, the WSA also enable members to become stronger, more successful and sustainable through providing a wide range of business support services. As of today, we have 147 member organisations, ranging from National Governing Bodies of Sport to small charities, education institutions and Local Authority leisure providers.

Sport and Leisure and the Future Generations Act

The Sport and Leisure sector has by and large responded well to the Future Generations Act. The Vision for Sport in Wales¹, created by Sport Wales in partnership with the sector places the wellbeing of future generations at its core. This has since been reflected in the strategy of Sport Wales² and a significant number of publicly funded sporting organisations refer to the Future Generations Act within their organisational strategies, for example the Football Association of Wales.

Crucially, most public funding of sport and leisure – channelled to the sector through Sport Wales – places the ongoing participation of children and young people at its heart. Sport Wales funding is primarily driven by the results of the School Sports Survey³, run around every four years. The survey tracks participation and latent demand and attempts to allocate funding accordingly. This is in recognition that sport and physical activity habits formed in childhood have lifelong positive impacts on individuals and wider society.

In this sense, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act has been a success within the sport and leisure sector thus far. However, there is still significant additional impact the sector could make in influencing wider behaviours – for instance, around 1 million people participate in sport regularly in Wales - and the sector could be further utilised to encourage positive behaviour in terms of environmental sustainability, community cohesion or the Welsh language amongst others.

Secondly, it is unclear the extent to which the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act has altered decision making processes when it comes to the future provision of public leisure space, most often Local Authority leisure and park facilities. These decisions are often made as part of Local

Government budget processes and are not often fully in control of the sport and leisure sector. Due to austerity, we have seen significant pressure on budgets over the last 15 years – consequently, non-statutory services (including leisure and sport) have been cut and facilities have closed, deteriorated or significantly changed.

Many in the sector would argue that these decisions have often been shortsighted, closures of leisure and community centres, increases to fees and charges to access playing fields etc, or the slow erosion of on the ground sports development teams within Local Authorities have all likely had a long-term impact on rates of participation in sport and physical activity here in Wales. Loss of public space to participate is also extremely difficult and often cost prohibitive to replace.

Due to the budget constraints of the past decade or more, it is difficult to pose a counterfactual – but it would seem apparent that in the face of very difficult financial decisions, too often decision makers have not utilised the Future Generations Act to make truly different choices. Decision makers have too often fallen back on the easier answer of cutting non-statutory services which deliver long term good, to deal with short-term financial pressures.

As we move forward with the Future Generations Act and review its implementation, the WSA and our membership would argue that our sector has significant ability to deliver against the wider wellbeing objectives that is currently under explored. Further funding, from areas outside of the traditional “leisure and cultural services” budget line, could enable sport, leisure and physical activity to significantly increase its contribution to Wales and the wellbeing of future generations.

¹ <https://visionforsport.wales/>

² <https://www.sport.wales/strategy/>

³ <https://www.sport.wales/research-and-insight/school-sport-survey/>