
Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Sir Ddinbych | Evidence from: Denbighshire County Council

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To whom it may concern:

Please find attached the response of Denbighshire County Council officers to the consultation on the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, being led by the Equality and Social Justice Committee of the Senedd.

As set out in the attached, The Well-being of Future Generations legislation is a crucial and progressive piece of legislation that provides a robust legislative framework that the Council relies on in its decision-making every day.

More than just the delivery of the Act itself, its vision and ethos has brought huge standing to Wales as a country - powerfully demonstrating our leadership in sustainable development to the world, which in turn can feed aspiration among our residents and within our communities.

While the Act has our support, there are some areas its approach can be strengthened to support more efficient and effective deliver of the sustainable development principle and we hope the attached reflections from our experience are useful in guiding the committee's deliberations. We are available to share additional detail should any further information be required.

Kind regards

Robyn Lovelock
Insight, Strategy and Delivery Manager

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015: Post-legislative scrutiny

Questions relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference	Denbighshire County Council - Officer Views
<p>How far has the intended objective of the Act been achieved?</p>	<p>The Well-being of Future Generations legislation is a crucial and progressive piece of legislation that provides a robust legislative framework that the Council relies on in its decision-making every day. More than just the delivery of the Act itself, its vision and ethos has brought huge standing to Wales as a country - powerfully demonstrating our leadership in sustainable development to the world, which in turn can feed aspiration among our residents and within our communities.</p> <p>We understand the objective of the Act is to embed the sustainable development principle into decision-making in Wales, such that future generations in Wales have at least the same quality of life as current generations, and this is to be achieved by requiring public bodies in Wales to prioritize the well-being of future generations when making decisions.</p> <p>As such, this long-term objective of the legislation has clearly not yet been achieved. We are encouraged that the Act is increasingly understood, owned and relied upon by our decision-makers, such that we are confident of progress towards the objective of the Act – the recent escalation of support from the Future Generations Commissioner's office has been welcome in this regard. Considering in more detail how key elements of the act are helping us deliver on the Act's objective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven Well-being Goals: the seven Well-being Goals capture directly the areas of concern for our residents, officers and elected members – to the point that our own Corporate plan directly reflects them – uniting our work in Denbighshire towards the Goals and the sustainable development principle. • Focus on Long-term sustainability: As with many public bodies, we have struggled to balance challenging short-

	<p>term priorities in an extremely pressured financial situation against the Act's guidance to work with a longer-term view. However, we are making progress in this area, for example discussing the idea of co-producing with residents and partners a Denbighshire Vision to 2100.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways of working: In addition to long-term thinking, we are increasingly collaborating across the organisation and with partners, involving residents and stakeholders in our work and integrating our work across the goals and well-being objectives. This is again challenged by the financial situation, but we are encouraged by the Future Generation Commissioner's recommendations around streamlining partnerships and by recent meetings in North Wales with the same commitment. We know we need to do more work on prevention and are looking at how to integrate this work into our transformation agenda.
Views on any action which should be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act and its implementation, including any specific drafting issues	<p>We consider the intended purpose of the Public Services Board to be essential to strengthening partnership working and delivery of the Well-being of Future Generations Act – that there are no other bodies which facilitate consideration of issues from the diverse perspectives of the member bodies, while they are sitting 'around the same table'. The concept offers a critical systems-led approach to local/regional priorities and to deliver value for money through partnership across the ways of working.</p> <p>While we consider the concept valuable and want to see the body continue, there are several ways we believe the PSB is not effective in its intention as it currently functions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without power or funding, the Board has little ability to influence decisions which are generally made elsewhere by bodies / partnerships with funding e.g. local authorities, Regional Partnership Boards, Ambition North Wales / CJC etc. • We see this as a particular risk around economic wellbeing in light of the Corporate Joint Committee mandate to lead this area without explanation of how this should sit alongside the PSB's mandate to lead on economic (and social, cultural and environmental) wellbeing. There is further risk that - without agreement on the definition of 'economic wellbeing' - the CJC interpretation of 'economic

	<p>wellbeing' will continue to focus only on economic development and not address the (linked) economic inequality within the region being led by the PSB. Without clarity on the definition, expectations and respective roles, the PSB will be further sidelined in this space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Act is not sufficiently integrated into nationally-mandated assessments of how public bodies are doing which misses opportunities to recognise achievements and progress implementation. For example, local authority Panel Performance Assessments or Treasury assurance reviews of major projects do not reference the goals, ways of working or other progress in implementation; grant funding does not support the ways of working or require evidence of what has been achieved for the Act. • Well-being Impact Assessments are working well within Denbighshire but we are currently (1) working with project teams to strengthen the evidence provided regarding positive and negative impacts across the goals, particularly on climate, nature and inequality (2) adding a requirement that conclusions and actions from the well-being impact assessment are made explicit and tracked through performance management. • The requirements of the legislation for Well-being Assessments to be completed every five years are not proving as effective as they might be. With wider macro-economic challenges and the economic well-being challenges outlined above, we are not seeing significant change over the five years such that the assessments are likely to be repetitive – while also being a huge amount of work. We would welcome less-onerous ways for the assessment to be completed, or for the PSB to be better resourced to deliver it. <p>We welcome the five yearly report from the commissioner and find the recommendations highly relevant to the times we are experiencing. While we are yet to review them formally, we are concerned how – despite their relevance – how we will implement them within such difficult financial constraints facing the council. On-going funding pressures, plus short-term, prescriptive grants (often at short notice) and legislative requirements limit our ability to adjust course and innovate.</p>
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<p>Are the review and reporting requirements under the Act are being met?</p>	<p>Yes, we are confident that the Well-being Objectives component of the legislation functions effectively. For the past decade, our work has been closely aligned with the well-being goals – notably with our corporate plan 2022-27, with objectives reviewed regularly and reported on across all levels of the local authority.</p> <p>However, it is worth noting that our services have selected other indicators for their progress against our well-being objectives, other than those set out as national well-being indicators https://www.gov.wales/wellbeing-wales-national-indicators</p> <p>Furthermore the Act is well-integrated and regularly referenced within our organisational processes: it is integrated into our decision making through systematic Well-being Impact Assessments, which accompany all major decisions, and are generally completed as a group exercise (building shared understanding and avoiding optimism bias). These assess implications for equalities, socio-economic disadvantage, Welsh language, biodiversity, and carbon impact—ensuring a balanced approach to decision-making that reflects the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working: long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement.</p> <p>However, while we are meeting requirements, engagement with PSB Well-being Plans and their annual reports remains limited, e.g. often not referenced in other strategic documents.</p>
<p>Views on the effectiveness of guidance made under the Act</p>	<p>Overall, we welcome the guidance made under the Act, and supplementary guidance provided by the Commissioner's office. The goals and ways of working set out in the Act provide a hugely helpful framework to lean on in our framing of discussions and decisions – particularly amid such divisive times. It provides a north star that we believe captures the hearts and minds of residents beyond the difficulties of challenging day-to-day decisions.</p>

	<p>However, we find some of the Act overly-prescriptive, particularly the guidance around preparation of the Well-being Assessments.</p> <p>More widely, as an organisation we found the journey tracker helpful and reference the findings as relevant to shaping decisions internally. Similarly we expect the discussions around the recent Commissioner's recommendations to help shape discussions and decisions.</p> <p>We welcome the increasing support available through the Commissioner's Office (national training series, offer of tailored support on key pieces of work) which we feel is timely if slightly overdue. There is still scope to build on this as we see a wide range of ownership, interpretation and delivery in how the Act shapes the work of the different services. We also propose that support could be beneficial for those on leadership teams who sit on the many boards regionally (PSBs, CJs, Regional Partnership Boards, corporate leadership teams etc.) with regards how they bring their "well-being hats" to discussions in the different boards, so there is clarity among those leaders about what good/excellent well-being outcomes look like, for example within economic development discussions.</p> <p>At an operational level, our officers have attended a Community of Practice around well-being impact assessments which they are finding valuable, but would appreciate more clarity on the short/longer term aims of the CoP and more consistency in engagement (e.g. meeting frequency, follow-up after meetings etc.) This is an important aspect of public bodies delivering on the Act, and we have a lot of valuable experience to share in this space as well as being keen to learn from others, but think this CoP approach could be improved.</p>
Views on how far the Act has been legally binding and enforceable	<p>As above, we have found it hugely helpful to be able to lean on the Act in framing discussions and decisions.</p> <p>However, the extent to which the Act is proving legally binding and enforceable is less evident. For example, while the Act sets out Goals and measures for lowering carbon (e.g. Prosperous, Responsible) and improving biodiversity</p>

	<p>(Resilient) there are no tools to test whether this will happen from a proposed project or consequences if it is not. We have been involved as a Pioneer Council' in a project with the WLGA that is developing tools to better inform such decisions (building on the Ambition North Wales leadership case study in the national Carbon in Infrastructure guidelines) but this has come from our initiative – not because its legally required to do so. Economic decisions would particularly benefit from better integration of social, environmental and cultural wellbeing considerations to meet the requirements of the act around prosperity (low carbon), resilience and equality – especially with regards construction (low carbon, resilient Wales).</p>
<p>Views on how far the Act has represented, and will continue to represent, value for money</p>	<p>The Act plays a critical role in promoting long-term thinking and already delivers value for money by requiring that decisions consider a wider range of perspectives, current and future impacts. This helps us make better decisions more effectively by reducing re-work, be more efficient by developing projects with multiple benefits, and more be more mindful of equitable outcomes from our work. It is helping embed a mindset towards long-term benefit across our services.</p> <p>That said, we believe there is significant potential to improve the effectiveness of the Public Services Boards (PSBs). We consider the intended purpose of the Public Services Board to be essential to strengthening partnership working and delivery of the Well-being of Future Generations Act – that there are no other bodies which facilitate consideration of issues from the diverse perspectives of the member bodies, while they are sitting 'around the same table'. The concept offers a critical systems approach to local/regional priorities and can help deliver value for money through partnership across the ways of working.</p> <p>While we consider the concept valuable and want to see the body continue, we are concerned that without teeth or funding, the Board has little ability to influence decisions which are generally made elsewhere by bodies / partnerships with funding e.g. local authorities, Regional Partnership Boards, Ambition North Wales / CJC etc. In its current structure, it demands a substantial amount of officer time and capacity,</p>

	<p>which would be fine if it led to stronger decisions – but without funding/power that time is needed on more impactful initiatives amid such a tight operating environment. Although the annual PSB Support Grant provides some assistance, its administrative requirements and restrictive criteria often limit the ability to pursue truly meaningful and innovative projects. In a similar vein, we have participated regionally in the North Wales Insight Partnership as an attempt to coordinate and share resources. The support of the Wales Co-Production Network has been invaluable in the Insight (and wider PSB) work, but remains constrained by lack of resource.</p>
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