
Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Ymateb gan: Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru | Evidence from: Public Health Wales



Briefing to Inform Committee Inquiry - Post Legislative Scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Submitted to the Equality and
Social Justice Committee

Public Health Wales

May 2025

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this briefing document is to inform the Equality and Social Justice Committee's Inquiry into post legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We see the Act as a genuinely transformational piece of legislation that can unite the collective power, passion and commitment of people across Wales. It embodies the key principles of public health and therefore has served as a key enabler for Public Health Wales.

While much progress has been made over the last ten years, we welcome the opportunity this Inquiry provides to reflect on progress and identify how we can build on the work to-date and accelerate this further in the coming years. In this briefing, Public Health Wales has provided information on:

- ❖ Examples of how we have applied the Act to our work nationally and internationally, as we work together with a range of partners for a healthier Wales.
- ❖ The specific questions raised by the Committee as part of the post legislative scrutiny inquiry into the Act, insofar as we can, as the National Public Health organisation for Wales.
- ❖ Key messages focused on how we can continue to maximise the Act as the underpinning enabling legislation to drive opportunities to increase healthy life expectancy and tackle health inequalities for our current and future generations.

2. Public Health Wales

We are the National Public Health organisation for Wales. Our purpose is working together for a healthier Wales. We help all people in Wales live longer, healthier lives. With our partners, we aim to increase healthy life expectancy, improve health and well-being, and reduce inequalities for everyone in Wales, now and for future generations.

Together, our teams work to prevent disease, protect health, and provide system leadership, specialist services and public health expertise. We are the primary source of public health information, research and innovation, to help everyone in Wales live healthier lives.

By 2035, we will have achieved a healthier future for Wales. We are working towards a Wales where people live longer, healthier lives and where all people in Wales have fair and equal access to the things that lead to good health and well-being.

3. Our case studies

Since it came into effect, we have used the Act and its five ways of working to drive the delivery of key strategic developments and initiatives. Examples of how we have used the Act to shape our work include:

3.1 Long-term thinking

In 2023, we launched our strategy, '[Working Together for a Healthier Wales](#)', which sets out our vision for achieving a healthier future for Wales. We are doing this through the delivery of our six strategic priorities, which are also our

organisational well-being objectives. These are as follows:

- ❖ Influencing the wider determinants of health
- ❖ Promoting mental and social well-being
- ❖ Promoting healthy behaviours
- ❖ Delivering excellent public health services
- ❖ Supporting a sustainable health and care system
- ❖ Tackling the public health effects of climate change

We embraced the Act as the enabling legislative driver for the development and implementation of our strategy. By focusing on the seven well-being goals, it has allowed us to take a long-term preventative approach that utilises futures thinking to focus on threats and opportunities for Wales. Our approach to implementing our strategy is underpinned by the Act's five ways of working, particularly our commitment to involve the public, and collaborate with our partners to deliver integrated and longer-term solutions.

3.2 Prevention

Prevention is at the heart of what we do across the breadth of our services and functions. We deliver evidence-informed clinical and public health services and advice, inform partners on the current and emerging threats to health in Wales, advocate for action to improve and protect health and reduce inequalities, and mobilise partners across Wales to translate evidence into policy and practice at scale to improve population health and well-being and reduce health inequalities.

For example, the *Tackling Diabetes Together Programme* is a collaborative programme that brings together partners from across health and the third sector, with a commitment to reducing the prevalence of type 2 diabetes, along with supporting more people to live well with diabetes. The programme was established following work undertaken by Public Health Wales on the projections of the prevalence of disease in Wales, indicating that by 2035, 1 in 11 people in Wales could be living with Type 2 Diabetes (an increase of 22%).

3.3 Integration

We are working to strengthen and develop the public health system in Wales, focusing on building system leadership capabilities, developing the workforce and enhancing integration across organisational boundaries. This involves working with a range of partners, including health boards, local authorities and the Welsh Government. We are committed to developing a more integrated public health system in Wales that supports joined-up working at a local, regional and national level across all domains of public health. This is reflected in areas such as the work to develop a new All-Wales Communicable Disease Outbreak Control Plan which builds on the learning from the Coronavirus pandemic and helps clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of all the partners to enable a more timely, coordinated and integrated response across the system in Wales.

3.4 Collaboration

Our *Time to Talk Public Health Panel*, which we publish every three months, allows us to monitor and gather information on the public's views on a range of public health issues. The questions are developed through collaboration between different parts of our organisation and with our stakeholders. The findings inform public health work, both within Public Health Wales and partner organisations across sectors. It allows the public to provide regular input into key issues and helps to shape future approaches and areas of focus. It also provides participants with an opportunity to directly identify areas and topics for consideration, which reflects our commitment to ongoing collaboration with the public and our partners.

3.5 Involvement

Our Vaccine Equity Strategy is focused on improving uptake rates for those with protected characteristics. It is focused on understanding inequity in uptake and what can be done to reduce it. This approach has involved collaboration with, and involvement from, communities and a range of partners to better understand people's needs and how we can deliver services that meet them.

4. Committee areas of focus

4.1 How far the intended objective of the Act is being achieved

We have used the definitions set out in Section 2 of the legislation as the basis on which we have interpreted this question. Reflecting on ten years since the Act was passed, we have seen significant positive change at a national level in relation to:

- ❖ providing a strong strategic direction for public bodies in Wales and informing Welsh Government strategies, which are aligned to the ambitions of the Act and enable public bodies to effectively respond
- ❖ changing the nature of conversations in response to the ambitions set out in the Act, particularly around long-term thinking and preventative action.

There are a range of examples and case studies available that demonstrate how public bodies across Wales have embraced the Act to work differently and deliver meaningful improvements to the people of Wales. We have included examples from Public Health Wales' perspective within this response, and a range of other case studies are available, through the work of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

However, implementation to-date has been variable across Wales, as reflected in our responses below. As a result, the Act has not achieved the system-wide change it intended. This is in part, the result of the pandemic which paused some of the work that was in train in beforehand, along with more fundamental system-level barriers. These include short-term funding arrangements, complex partnership arrangements across Wales, differing outcomes measures across sectors, and short-term focused planning and accountability mechanisms.

4.2 Any action which should be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act and its implementation, including any specific drafting issues

In responding to this question, it is important to recognise the wider contextual changes and societal shifts that have occurred since the Act came into effect. In particular, the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have fundamentally impacted on health and well-being, and the priorities facing public sector bodies in Wales. These issues are likely to have led to significant longer-term implications that will affect Wales over the coming years.

Public bodies continue to operate under different planning, accountability and funding arrangements, which can create barriers to embedding the Act. This can be a particular challenge where organisations are seeking to work across traditional boundaries, such as between health and social care, and on issues that are longer-term in nature. This has been at times exacerbated by legislation that may not fully complement the Act, which may be because of the timing of different pieces of legislation preceding the Act.

It would also be helpful to consider if, and how, other recent legislation and regulations support the delivery of the Act, including the Public Health (Wales) Act (2017), Socio-economic Duty (2021) and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (2014). To support local implementation, it will be important to ensure that these are complementary and do not duplicate or add complexity.

Greater alignment and more integrated national frameworks and guidance would help to support the embedding of the Act, which will enable organisations to work and plan more effectively together. An opportunity to do this could be to identify significant cross-governmental issues, such as child poverty, health inequalities, or employability, that require a cross-sector response with clearly defined outcomes that could be shared across different organisations and sectors, that could drive joined-up action. Consideration could be given to how moving towards shared accountability, consistent guidance and long-term funding could support the delivery of the well-being goals and any shared outcomes.

It might also be timely to consider the relationship between Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) – established through the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, and Public Services Boards (PSBs) and whether any simplification of arrangements could enhance the effectiveness of regional working. Consideration could be given to greater clarity being provided around the role of each partnership, including updating guidance where necessary. In addition, partnership accountability arrangements, including how organisations are held accountable for their partnership work, could be strengthened. There could be a strengthened focus on the collective ownership of longer-term outcome measures.

It is also important to consider the importance of ongoing public involvement and what mechanisms are in place to continue to engage the public around the implementation of the Act.

4.3 Whether the review and reporting requirements under the Act are being met

It is our view that the review and reporting requirements are largely being met, such as the Welsh Government well-being indicators, public body well-being

objectives and PSB well-being plans. However, the impact of this activity is less clear. It is important to consider whether these requirements have 'shifted the dial' to make us more focused on long-term outcomes or whether we have increased the number of reporting mechanisms but remain largely focused on short-term performance measures.

It will also be important to consider how we can ensure that the recent reports from the Future Generations Commissioner and the Auditor General have the impact needed, and that the recommendations are effectively taken forward. There is an opportunity for more focus and emphasis to be placed on the Commissioner's Report recommendations and to ensure they are monitored so that any relevant learning can be shared and built upon.

4.4 The effectiveness of guidance made under the Act

In 2016, a comprehensive suite of guidance documents was published by the Welsh Government to support the implementation of the Act by public bodies, PSBs, and town and community councils. Our experience is that the guidance is simple and easy to use. However, as set out above, the challenge is translating the guidance to system-wide action.

Furthermore, the guidance documents have not been updated since 2016. We would recommend that they are reviewed and updated to reflect the changes that have occurred in the last decade, along with lessons from implementation, societal changes over the last ten years and to reflect other relevant legislation. It might also be useful to reflect on guidance published by other organisations, including Public Health Wales. For example, our Health and Sustainability Hub has published a range of resources to support teams to '[Be the Change](#)' that is required by the Act. We have also undertaken a deep dive into the [Well-being Economy](#).

In addition to the written guidance, opportunities of facilitated peer to peer learning and support is incredibly valuable. While the Future Generation Commissioner's Office provides some support, there could be more opportunities for this across public bodies. The recent recommendations made by both the Future Generations Commissioner and the Auditor General for Wales should inform any further guidance and support that is put in place to support the ongoing implementation of the Act.

4.5 How far the Act has been legally binding and enforceable

We do not feel well placed to assess whether the Act has been legally binding and enforceable. However, from Public Health Wales' perspective we are confident that we have embraced the word, and spirit, of the Act since it was established. Over the last decade, we have adopted an approach focused on embedding the Act and using it as a key driver to help us deliver our strategy and plans, rather than to see it as a compliance requirement. This is reflected in the examples provided and our work both internally and with partners across the public sector.

4.6 How far the Act has represented, and will continue to represent, value for money

As reflected in the recent Audit Wales Report, the Act is fundamental to delivering value for money for the people of Wales. Within Public Health Wales, we have used the Act to drive decisions around key strategic developments and to inform the

wider system over opportunities for delivering value for money. We utilised the Act and our commitment to supporting a 'net zero' Wales to shape our strategic estates programme, undertaken in 2016. This saw us save 132 tonnes of carbon dioxide, divert 41 tonnes of waste from landfill and ensure that over 90% of the furniture used was either repurposed, reconditioned or refurbished.

Our recent report, '[Investing in a Healthier Wales: Prioritising Prevention](#)' provides evidence and a range of case studies showing that investing in prevention can help everyone live longer, healthier lives. The report shows that effective prevention programmes offer value for money and enable the prioritisation of public funding. Prevention can address health inequalities, reverse the nation's health decline, and promote well-being. There is a significant opportunity to utilise key evidence such as this to inform future decisions around system funding and prioritisation.

5. Summary messages

We appreciate the opportunity to engage with the Inquiry and reflect on the implementation of the Act over the last ten years. The Inquiry comes at a time when Wales is facing significant public health challenges. As we have seen, particularly during our response to the pandemic, we can deliver transformational and system-wide change when we harness the collective efforts of public bodies. It is in this spirit that we see the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We must seek to make the five ways of working the norm across, within and between all public bodies. We must build on the examples and learning identified over the last ten years as we seek to move even faster and more fundamentally towards improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

To do so, we need to be willing to address the barriers that remain to enabling these changes. In particular, the move towards longer-term funding arrangements, more outcomes-focused accountability, alignment of guidance and simplification of partnership arrangements are essential. We also need to challenge the cultural barriers that remain and recognise the need to ensure that we develop a workforce that is equipped with the skills to lead and deliver within a complex system. We must ensure we continue to engage with and involve the public. We cannot achieve the benefits of the Act without collectively working with communities across Wales, learning from what works (and what does not) and be willing to reflect on and embrace feedback.

We are committed to a Wales where everyone is supported to live longer and healthier lives, and where good health is the foundation for sustainable communities. Where we are a nation where ill-health is prevented by giving people fair and equal access to the building blocks of health and wellbeing – good jobs, homes and living spaces, and accessible care closer to home – and by tackling disruptors of these building blocks – a changing climate and poverty. The Well-being of Future Generations Act is the legislation that enables this to happen and provides a compass for us to navigate through the challenges and realise the opportunities to achieve a healthy and sustainable Wales