



Rhwydwaith
Cyd-gynhyrchu
Cymru | Co-production
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for Wales

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

Ymateb gan: Rhwydwaith Cyd-gynhyrchu Cymru | Evidence from: Co-production
Network for Wales

Written Evidence Submission to the Equality and Social Justice Committee Post-legislative Scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

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About us

The Co-production and Network for Wales is a community of practitioners who learn, share and improve together. Our vision is of a fairer and more sustainable Wales where everyone has a voice that is heard. We are working hands-on with clusters of Public Services Boards (PSBs) to support the development of their practice of meaningful engagement and involvement, moving towards full co-production as part of our Project Dewi - a 5-year programme funded through the National Lottery Community Fund.

We are submitting this response based on direct, ongoing experience of working with PSBs across Wales. Our role involves supporting public bodies to implement the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (the Act), particularly through community involvement, co-production, and culture change. Our insights reflect operational realities, institutional behaviours, and the perspectives of some PSB officers, community partners, and citizens.

We are firmly in support of the Act and its ambition. It remains a globally significant piece of legislation, and we are committed to helping realise its full potential.

1. How far the intended objective of the Act is being achieved.

Observable changes within PSBs:

Project Dewi set out to plant seeds of co-production within the PSB structures with the aim to support them in ensuring that their communities were central to the process of implementing the Act's objectives. During this time we have seen awareness of the Act has increased, and we observe growing willingness among officers to engage in co-production and collaborative working. As part of our Project Dewi, PSB officers across clusters have engaged in training on co-production and involvement. There has also been delivery of a number of one-off or initial co-production initiatives such as the Newborough Community Hackathon (2023) with Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB or youth engagement with Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB (2024/5).

Integral to these positive changes has been a fostering of a collaborative way of working, building trusted relationships and demonstrating what participatory approaches can achieve. As the leading organisation of co-production and involvement in Wales, we have been able to utilise our wider working relationships and knowledge to enable join up with community groups and other projects that have benefited the work of the PSB. Introduced new approaches to meetings, enabling more productive and purposeful conversations. This cultural change in statutory meeting structures has been challenging for PSB members, but where we have been able to support this change, it has energised the meetings and created new opportunities for building relationships and collaborative working to further the Act's objectives, particularly in embedding the 5 ways of working.

This said, through our engagement with PSB structures across Wales, we have also observed that delivery of the seven well-being goals remains fragmented and involvement, as a way of working, is not consistent within PSB structures. As recognised in the Future Generations Report 2025, which we were pleased to see recommending that more must be done to rebuild trust and foster meaningful involvement.¹ With multiple and competing priorities impacting on the public services, it has been difficult for PSBs to articulate how their activities directly contribute to the well-being goals and commit to embedding a culture of involvement within their ways of working. However participatory practices are crucial to enabling them to identify with, work with and realise with their communities the responses needed to achieve the well-being goals. Citizens want to act on these areas and hold key information into what needs to happen and how it will impact them, public bodies need to be empowered to be bold and operationalise the opportunities they have to involve and work with their communities. Strengthened leadership, clearer communication and more proactive engagement from the Welsh Government could enhance alignment and ensure the intent of the legislation is more effectively realised across Wales.

¹ <https://futuregenerations.wales/cym/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Future-Generations-Report-2025.pdf>

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

Structure and culture of PSBs:

The Act is an ambitious piece of legislation however its complexity has led to many stakeholders feeling it lacks clarity, direction, and enforceability. It can be perceived as a top-down initiative rather than a collaborative process with public services, suggesting that a consideration is needed in how the implementation of the Act incorporates the five ways of working, including Welsh Government's approach to implementation.

Positive cultural shifts are visible (e.g. place-based models in Ceredigion, and health board collaboration in West Wales). Participatory approaches have been brought into PSB meetings and subgroups delivering on their objectives, helping to redesign how they are run and incorporate the ways of working. However there is an overreliance on individuals to drive and maintain this shift, and we have seen that this can easily be reversed when key leaders or chairs change with differing perspectives and priorities. Local authority culture heavily shapes PSBs due to their role in hosting and facilitating meetings. This affects openness to change due to a risk-averse culture. The Act's aspirations will not be realised without encouraging public bodies to take well-managed, shared risks, that enable them to adopt participatory and open practices as standard in their ways of working.

Geography and local identity has shaped the priorities PSB. For example, cultural and linguistic priorities are in West Wales, while inclusion and diversity have greater precedence in the East. These regional distinctions highlight positive opportunities to reflect and allow flexibility for local context however also suggest the need to ensure cross pollination and increasing awareness of areas that may not be as high up on the agenda due to localised assumptions, for example on the diversity of a population. This can be explored effectively through participatory approaches with local communities. For example, our recent Involvement Series event in Aberystwyth, explored how citizens can help realise the goal of a Prosperous Wales under the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Through speakers' experience, discussion, and a World Café exercise, we uncovered key insights on the role of language, collaboration, and citizen involvement in tackling poverty and driving meaningful change.²

Where there are strong ties to the third sector, we see a distinctly positive change to the culture of that PSB. This has enabled an openness to participatory approaches and facilitated involvement. However there is a relative lack of third sector and community voice as standard across all PSBs undermining their potential for collaboration and involvement. The statutory distinction between “members” and “invited participants” contributes to a perceived and actual hierarchy, which can exclude valuable experience and grassroots insight.

² <https://copronet.wales/five-things-we-learned-from-our-from-poverty-to-prosperity-event/>

There are barriers to creating a consistent understanding or operationalisation of the five ways of working, particularly in relation to prevention and long-term thinking. This has been made difficult with changes and turnover in staffing as well as inconsistencies in levels of engagement at PSB meetings.

Resource constraints have further impacted the ability to realise the Act's intentions. Officers often face limitations in terms of time, support, and clarity, which hinders progress. This has caused resistance to taking advantage of opportunities to further the working of PSBs, including engagement and involvement activity, as there is limited capacity to follow through on the resulting actions or deliver the work aligned to possible funding.

There are also concerns around the current PSB model. In some cases, it is perceived as lacking sufficient mandate and authority, and there are often concerns noted of duplication of effort with Regional Partnership Boards and Corporate Joint Committees. This can lead to structural disconnection which reduces impact.

A key challenge in the legislation is its assumption that PSBs are well-resourced delivery bodies, capable of meeting complex output requirements. In practice, most PSBs today have limited capacity which is often focused primarily on maintaining meeting cycles. However, their unique value lies in their role as strategic partnerships - they have the great potential to be platforms for building trusted relationships, aligning priorities, and streamlining the wider strategic landscape. To be most effective, the Act should place greater emphasis on supporting and enhancing this relational role rather than imposing operational expectations that exceed current resourcing levels for PSBs.

Recommended actions:

- **Clarifying accountability and strengthening oversight mechanisms** would help ensure that responsibilities are well understood and that progress can be more consistently monitored and supported.
- **Simplifying the legislative language and accompanying guidance** could enable more confident and consistent implementation across PSBs.
- **Improving the interface between PSBs and other strategic partnerships**, such as Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs), would help reduce duplication and promote more coherent, joined-up working.
- **Clarifying the role of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner and Welsh Government in relation to PSBs** is also important. These relationships should be collaborative and enabling, with a focus on shared learning, capacity-building, and support—rather than being perceived as directive or hierarchical.

3. Whether the review and reporting requirements under the Act are being met.

Current practice within PSBs:

Well-being assessments and reports could offer an opportunity for meaningful reflection, learning and improvement. The process of developing well-being assessments and annual reports can offer an opportunity to involve communities in and strengthen strategic alignment across activity to meet well-being goals. However in practice they have been previously produced and reviewed as a compliance-driven exercise, with limited opportunity for engagement, cross siloed working or longer term thinking. The current formats tend to favour cautious, risk-averse approaches and with limited space for exploring the opportunity for co-produce activities with communities rather than conduct one off consultation.

There is untapped potential to embrace more creative and participatory approaches (such as storytelling, film, visual media), that would reflect the ways of work of the Act. Greater encouragement and support for such methods could enhance transparency, engagement and impact. This would build trust with communities, explore complexities of lived experiences and ensure communities felt heard and valued within the process.

Recommendations:

- **Shift the focus of reporting from compliance toward learning and development**, enabling PSBs to reflect more openly on what is working, what isn't, and why.
- **Encourage the use of diverse and creative reporting methods**, and foster a culture that values a full spectrum of evidence—including both successes and setbacks—as essential to long-term progress.
- **Embed evaluative thinking from the outset of planning cycles**, ensuring that reflection, adaptation, and learning are integral to the way plans are developed and delivered.

4. The effectiveness of guidance made under the Act.

Current guidance for PSBs:

The 'Shared Purpose: Shared Future 3' guidance document, while well-intentioned, does not always align with the practical realities faced by under-resourced, multi-agency partnerships. In its current form, the guidance can inadvertently contribute to increased administrative demands without proportionate improvements in delivery or outcomes.

A strong emphasis on process over impact can sometimes constrain action and innovation. The requirement for PSBs to produce multiple formal outputs—such as assessments, well-being plans,

and annual reports—within each five-year cycle often limits the time and capacity available for implementation and long-term change. This can unintentionally promote short-termism, which runs counter to the principles of sustainable development the Act seeks to uphold.

In addition, overlapping organisational plans contributes to complexity, administrative burden, and reduced coherence in collective efforts. Streamlining expectations and aligning planning processes could help strengthen strategic focus and enable more impactful collaboration across partners. Multiple overlapping organisational plans creates an administrative burden and weakens the coherence of collective action.

Recommendations:

The guidance needs to be revised, simplified and enabling:

- **Provide more flexible, example-led guidance**, including practical case studies and links to external tools (such as our range of resources on co-production for PSB³), to help translate the principles of the Act into action across diverse local contexts.
- **Empower PSBs to define their own success criteria** within the framework of the Act, enabling them to tailor their approaches to local priorities while remaining aligned with the overarching goals of sustainable development and well-being.

5. How far the Act has been legally binding and enforceable.

Accountability and scrutiny of PSBs:

Current scrutiny arrangements, primarily conducted through local authority committees, may inadvertently reinforce existing power imbalances and do not always reflect the collaborative, partnership-based ethos at the heart of PSBs. Officers have noted that scrutiny processes can feel procedural rather than purposeful, with limited focus on genuine progress toward well-being goals or the application of the five ways of working.

The emphasis on compliance within the scrutiny framework can unintentionally discourage innovation and risk-taking. While oversight is essential, effectiveness cannot be measured by compliance alone, especially in a model that values long-term thinking, partnership working and preventative approach.

There have been reported changes in PSB meeting culture during meetings open to the public. This has created spaces that enable open, constructive dialogue with members of the PSB and public having heightened engagement in subjects discussed. In Cwm Taf Morgannwg, positive work has been carried out to involve the voices of young people within the PSB structure. The Co-production Network for Wales has supported events to engage young people and explore

³ <https://copronet.wales/category/resources/>

the co-development of reverse mentoring, with young people engaging with PSB members. This is in its early stages however has the potential to bring constructive challenge from young people within future planning and scrutiny.

This has demonstrated how public participation in PSB meetings can be effective in driving forward effectiveness in comparison to formal, procedural approaches. However, limited infrastructure currently exists to support informal or developmental scrutiny, and public access to PSB processes remains restricted, reducing opportunities for transparency and participation.

Financially, while recognising that PSBs lack dedicated funding, many do not fully utilise any funds that are available to them. This is often due to the mechanisms through which funding is distributed, as well as varying levels of motivation or clarity around how the funding can be most effectively used. Strengthening support, flexibility, and shared understanding around funding could help address this issue.

There is a clear opportunity to explore how other parts of the public service system—such as procurement and finance teams—could play a more active role in embedding collaboration, long term thinking and integration as part of the ways of the Act, helping to translate its intent into more tangible mechanisms.

Recommendations:

- **Review and revise the current scrutiny model** to better reflect the collaborative, cross-sector nature of PSBs. Oversight mechanisms should be designed to support partnership working, rather than defaulting to structures designed for single organisations.
- **Explore more public-facing and participatory approaches to scrutiny**, such as themed open meetings or citizen panels, to strengthen transparency, build public trust, and ensure diverse voices, including young people's voices, help shape local well-being agendas.
- **Involve procurement and finance professionals more actively** in the strategic delivery of the Act, recognising their critical role in embedding long-term thinking, collaboration, and sustainability into core systems and decisions.
- **Consider performance-based incentives**—for example, linking access to certain grants or resources with clear evidence of applying the five ways of working. This could help reinforce the practical value of the Act and encourage continuous improvement.

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

Concerns with assessing value for money through PSBs:

We believe that framing the question of the Act's effectiveness solely in terms of "value for money" may risk missing its long-term purpose. The Act is designed to promote prevention and sustainability—areas where benefits often take time to materialise and are not always easily captured through short-term financial metrics. In regards to involvement, this is predicated on the building of trusted relationships between communities and public services, something that is urgently needed in the current political environment but will require time and investment to achieve. We would advise that evaluating its impact therefore requires a more nuanced, future-focused lens.

At the same time, there is a recognised need to address inefficiencies within the system. Duplication is a common challenge—not only between different statutory boards and their respective assessments (e.g. PSBs, RPBs, CJC), but also within PSBs themselves, where partner organisations such as local authorities, health boards, and fire and rescue services may be conducting overlapping work. This can lead to resource inefficiencies and engagement fatigue among partners and stakeholders.

Moreover, many well-being plans largely reflect existing organisational activity, with limited evidence that collaborative efforts are consistently adding new value. There is an opportunity to strengthen the distinct contribution of PSBs by fostering deeper collaboration, shared innovation, and joint action that extends beyond business-as-usual.

PSBs have the potential to fundamentally change the way their member organisations work together, involve their communities in their work, and understand their role in overcoming regional challenges. Concentrating on the 5 ways of working would help to provide this focus in their work, establish a meaningful point of difference between PSB and other regional multi-agency bodies, and reduce the risk of short-termism, tokenistic actions, or reverse engineering of Well-being Plans to align with actions already committed to.

Recommendations:

- **Rationalise overlapping structures and statutory duties across boards**, helping to streamline governance, reduce duplication, and make best use of limited resources.
- **Promote integrated and collaborative planning processes**, encouraging shared priorities and joint action across partnerships to deliver more coherent and impactful outcomes.
- **Invest in well-resourced support for PSBs**, recognising that dedicated, skilled staff are often central to driving progress, sustaining partnerships, and translating strategic intent into meaningful action.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 remains a significant piece of legislation. However, without reforms to its implementation, accountability, and structural support, its transformative potential risks being lost. Our evidence reflects the lived realities of those working to bring the Act to life at the frontline of Welsh public services.

We would welcome the opportunity to provide oral evidence to further explore the involvement activities we are working on with PSBs to improve the Act's implementation or further detail on any of the points raised in this submission.