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Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Ymateb gan: Cyngor Bro Morgannwg | Evidence from: The Vale of Glamorgan Council

For the attention of: Jenny Rathbone MS Chair
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WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015: POST-LEGISLATIVE SCRUTINY

We are delighted to offer some thoughts from the Vale of Glamorgan Council which we hope assists with the Senedd Review. We have contributed to the WLGA's evidence but welcome the opportunity to elaborate a little further from our local perspective.

The Council is a passionate advocate for the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and we were early adopters of the legislation. This process was invaluable to us a decade ago as we embarked on a whole organisation transformation, focusing on the needs (both now and of the future) for our residents and shaping the Council we needed to be to deliver it. The opportunities that early adoption brought were significant and were ones we relished. We worked hard to reflect the Act in our then Corporate Plan, bringing further integration to our work than in the past, pushing forward with collaboration as part of our transformation programme in establishing new regional services and involving our staff through our management development programme and other development opportunities.

The Act has brought about significant change in our work and, even more importantly, in our approach to that work. The Act enshrines the sustainable development principle in legislation and this is useful in as much as it 'requires' public bodies to consider it in their work. However, as seen in your recent report and that of the Auditor General, levels of compliance vary. It is our belief, however, that in order to truly deliver on the Act's essence, compliance is not enough. It requires a step change in how organisations think as well as operate. The five ways of working have proven to be a useful tool to embed the work. This Council has integrated the Principle within our corporate planning processes for over a decade, bringing together the strategic work of the organisation with the lens of Future Generations. Our established Insight Board is a good example of this integration, bringing senior colleagues from across the Council together regularly to consider a range of integrated planning activity such as risk, finance, procurement, people, digital and assets amongst others in a single and on-going conversation to ensure our

work is aligned and challenged by the Act. These ways of working structurally are important to drive connections, but the culture of seeing how our work comes together holistically is even more powerful.

The way the Act prompts bodies to think about connecting resources with outcomes and the reinforcement of that thinking through the Local Government & Election Act has provided the foundation for thinking about prevention and the long-term which should lead to greater overall value for public money if decisions are well taken. Having recently chaired the annual series of challenge sessions with our Directors to consider their self-assessment reports using the five ways of working as a way of understanding how our resources link with delivering our corporate priorities across the Council, it is clear that the Act can help focus on achieving value for money when applied consistently.

We would acknowledge though that there is further for us to go as a Council and we have been pleased to have the opportunity to develop our new Plan, Vale 2030, with you and your team and to embed the five ways of working as drivers in our transformation programme, Reshaping. To meet the challenges of even the immediate future, will require us to harness the Act even further and challenge ourselves and others in the decisions we take. We see that the overall the pace of change is probably slower than it should be across Wales and it is sometimes difficult to see the Act embedded in the work of Welsh Government particularly with regards to long term, integration and prevention. This in turn creates difficulties for public bodies particularly with regards to funding, innovation and transformation. The lack of integration and long term thinking from Welsh Government, particularly with regards to funding also means that the Act could have provided greater value for money. We would agree that the challenges of single year budgets and political cycles restrict the ability to think longer-term and welcome the conversations that are now taking place in how we can collectively work to overcome these, and that Welsh Government have indicated a willingness to enable longer-term financial planning over a medium-term horizon.

The Act's introduction of Public Services Boards was welcomed, however the lack of proper funding for these bodies and the prescription around the Wellbeing Assessments and Plans mean that PSBs could have achieved more if there had been more freedom and fewer constraints. There is a collective power in bringing partners together to respond to areas of mutual benefit across the environment and climate, the wider public health agenda and tackling poverty, for example. However, the legislation's five year cycle means in reality that nearly half of that period is spent on the preparation of an assessment and wellbeing plan which distracts from tackling ongoing and long-term issues. We are developing our thinking around the forthcoming assessment and plan and will look forward to discussing with your Office and the Government to see where there are opportunities to innovate and reduce bureaucracy whilst bringing partners together to tackle issues. Proper resourcing of PSBs would also make a significant difference and would enable them to be more effective, especially as they are regularly compared with Regional Partnership Boards which in contrast have significant spending power and therefore different levels of buy-in and potential impact.

The understanding of the public and elected Members of the work of PSBs is still under developed and an area that we hope to progress further with. In recent years there has been more interest in the work of the PSB by scrutiny members. However, the challenge for us is to move from 'interest' to more detailed understanding and challenge of the impact the work of the PSB is having on the lives of residents of the Vale.

Audit Wales should be commended for their work in developing audit approaches for the Act and it is clear that over time these have become less procedural and more about the essence of the Act. However, this has taken more time to mature than in many public bodies and it would be welcomed if these could be further enhanced, for example in moving away from requiring bodies to evidence by rote the five ways of working but rather in understanding the way these are applied and seen in organisations' work.

We would be supportive of the guidance associated with the Act being reviewed to reflect how

public bodies now operate and there needs to be more trust in how public bodies can deliver. The guidance needs to reflect changes in the past decade and the current challenges and pressures, in particular the way in which they could be future proofed – specifically around prevention and longer-term thinking. The references in your recent report are again timely, and there is an opportunity for us to take our work on prevention to the next and necessary level, in particular on public health, climate and poverty issues.

A more ‘enforcement’ approach to the Act could have been taken and may have led to more momentum. However, we would argue that that this would have been to the detriment of the collegiate approach that has developed and for those organisations who are positively responding. The current approach, particularly with the constructive relationships with your team at the Future Generations Commissioners Office feels more likely to bring about success in the longer term but there are potentially areas where a harder line could be taken to give the Act more teeth.

We have begun considering our response to the recent reports on the Act from yourself and the Auditor General. These feel timely and resonate with us at this juncture. From our early work we see that the findings in both reports will challenge our thinking and push us yet further. We hope, too, that they will lead to the changes needed to reinforce the Act across Wales. We are making early preparations to convene our entire chief officer team to consider the reports in detail and collectively identify the areas we will focus on in the coming years and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Yours sincerely



Rob Thomas
Chief Executive



Councillor Lis Burnett
Executive Leader