

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

Submission by: Conwy County Borough Council



Conwy - Sir flaengar sy'n creu cyfleoedd

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How far has the intended objective of the Act been achieved?

It would be ambitious to expect that the long-term aspirations of the Act would have been achieved within its first decade. In relation to the 5 ways of working our view is:

- **Collaboration.** There remains a complex web of collaborations, some of which work well, others do not but are obliged to continue owing to statutory requirements. Collaboration can be restricted by short-term grant allocations and statutory obligations that require significant bureaucracy.
- **Involvement.** There is a commitment to involvement, although it is still challenging to engage all areas of the community with limited investment. A lot of proposals involve amalgamation, closure, moving or amending services in order to modernise, protect, or make a service sustainable. Engaging on budget setting and increasing council tax or fees is incredibly challenging owing to the complexity of the accountancy system, and the inevitable need to increase costs owing to inflation and underfunding.
- **Prevention.** There is a commitment to prevention, but again, owing to budget cuts, there is a need for invest to save to push service focus from reactive to preventative. We have some excellent examples, particularly in terms of flood coastal defence and social care provision.
- **Long-term.** Again, there is a commitment to long-term, but further assistance is needed to help local authorities with future trends. We are restricted in Conwy owing to the current budget formula, which does not sufficiently recognise our older population and future trend forecasts for an increasing elder population.
- **Integration.** We have embedded the principles of the act well within our business processes. It is positive to see that other public sector organisations are now included within the statutory obligation, but there is a great deal more work to be done to look across the well-being goals through a collective public sector lens. But again, we are severely hampered by capacity and budget to do so.

In so far as the objective of the Act is to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales, we would question whether we are any further forward as a nation. Significant national and global challenges have played their part to disrupt the successful course of the Act, and in a worsening climate for public sector finance, we are in a spiral of managed decline against increasing threats.

A great deal of good work has been done in support of the environment over the last decade. However, this has been more in response to the climate / nature emergency and the push towards Net Zero by 2030 than anything to do with the Well-being of Future Generations Act. There have also been positive moves in support of the Welsh Language, but it is unclear to what extent this is as a result of the Act.

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

The overly-prescriptive arrangements surrounding Public Services Boards are entirely ineffective and add no value when there are alternative more flexible collaborations where senior leaders talk. In an overcrowded partnership landscape with no resources and limited capacity, PSBs struggle to add any value or benefit to their communities. Formalising these previously voluntary networks of public service partners has not worked and too much is expected of them. We would recommend that these are stripped out of the legislation. The requirements of the legislation surrounding Well-being Assessments are also proving to be burdensome, particularly at five-yearly intervals. Conducting an assessment of local area needs prior to determining local well-being objectives is important, but there are less-onerous ways in which this could be achieved, or alternatively they need to be appropriately resourced like they are with the regional social care partnerships.

We work with colleagues in other partnerships where we can, but there is silo working in Welsh Government in the way some collaborations are prescriptively funded and others are not funded sufficiently. Grants can be so prescriptive and short-term, they limit innovation.

The Well-being of Future Generations Office appears to be well funded, and we welcome the 2025 report that acknowledges the need to simplify partnerships and invest in the public sector, which is at breaking point. However, we would question the lack of connection to the 13 PSBs and view that they are all well established. The 50 recommendations are well intended, but do not reflect the fact that many are already being worked on or are overly simplified – for example, increase public engagement to build trust. We are conscious that this response may appear overly cynical – be assured we want to make change, we want to improve services, but we cannot stress enough how

debilitating the current financial situation is, and in that respect the Act has limited impact. There appears to be a view in the consultation slides that momentum is about more buy in. This is not so, there is buy in – we really want to innovate (and we have some great examples), but funding pressures and short-term financial budget setting, and prescriptive grants and legislative requirements are really restricting us.

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

We are satisfied that the Well-being Objectives aspect of the legislation work well. We have been aligned to the well-being goals for the last 10 years and we're confident that the Act is known and referenced in our business processes. We have good evidence that our objectives are actively reviewed and reported upon regularly at a local authority level. However, we would again question their value at the level of the Public Services Boards. Enthusiasm for, or engagement with PSB Well-being Plans and their annual reports is limited, and again, add no lasting community value.

The effectiveness of guidance made under the Act.

Some aspects of the guides are useful where clarification of expectation is required, but for the most part they are overly-prescriptive, particularly with regards to the preparation of the Well-being Assessments.

How far the Act has been legally binding and enforceable.

We believe that local authorities have done their utmost to adhere to the spirit of the legislation. However, more broadly we don't feel that the Act is given prevalence over meeting short-term needs. The Well-being of Future Generations Commissioner's Office are a friendly team, but in terms of adding value since 2016, our reflections are that the office have showcased good practice but at times have added further bureaucracy requirements when information is readily available in annual reports. Likewise, we do not feel the journey checker, in its various guises, adds any value. The role of the Welsh Government's Local Partnerships team in this space is also confusing and neither are well connected to regional arrangements.

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

In impact assessing decisions and projects from the perspective of future generations, we do believe that the Act encourages consideration of long-term value for money alongside futures thinking. However, the amount of officer time and capacity wasted on supporting the ineffective Public Services Boards structure (including Well-being Assessments) nationally is considerable, notwithstanding the annual PSB Support Grant that adds to the administrative burden, and the criteria for which prevents any truly beneficial projects to be brought forward.