

## **Community Housing Cymru Group Written Evidence to the Environment and Sustainability Committee into the Inquiry into the general principles of the well-being of the Future Generation Bill**

### **Introduction to Community Housing Cymru Group (CHC Group)**

CHC Group is made up of Community Housing Cymru, Care & Repair Cymru and Crew Regeneration Wales, who came together to form a Group in 2010 to jointly champion not-for-profit housing, care and regeneration, effectively collaborating for communities. Community Housing Cymru (CHC) is the representative body for housing associations and community mutuals in Wales, which are all not-for profit organisations. Our members work closely with local government, third sector organisations and the Welsh Government to provide a range of services in communities across Wales and ensure that the Welsh social housing movement is kept fully informed and represented.

The Welsh Government recently confirmed that as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) are not auditable public sector organisations they are exempt from the Future Generations Bill. There is no legal commitment for housing associations in Wales to meet upcoming requirements of the Welsh Government's Future Generation Bill of putting sustainable development as a core commitment of its work.

Although CHC Group and members are exempt of the Future Generations Bill, CHC are happy to provide oral evidence in front of the Energy and Sustainability Committee if required.

### **1. How the Welsh Government should legislate to put sustainability and sustainable development at the heart of government and the wider public sector;**

The principles of sustainable development should be embedded in all legislation and guidelines for government officials and public sector organisations.

The Welsh Government needs to ensure that sustainability and sustainable development continues to be at the centre of policy making in Wales.

Issues of sustainability will need to be a core concern of government and the bill should ensure that Wales leads in this requirement. There is considerable scope for improving lives through progressive legislation, and while the CHC Group welcomes the introduction of the bill, it is also important to note that non-legislative interventions are just as important. It is also important that clear links are made between the bill and the various policy and legislative developments being led through different departments in Welsh Government in order to ensure that it is effective and part of an integrated change. The new bill will provide Wales with a unique opportunity to develop more integrated policy and practice which has long been recognised as the major requirement for improved public services and maximising outcomes for the population of Wales.

The Welsh Government needs to ensure that public sector organisations put an emphasis on sustainability and sustainable development when developing or revising policies, initiatives or plans. The new bill should ensure that sustainable development is at the heart of public sector decision making and delivery. The Welsh Government should develop a structure and procedures for imposing a duty on public sector bodies to meet sustainable development requirements.

The Welsh Government also needs to have a legal requirement to ensure that all public bodies in Wales consider how their procurement activities contribute to environmental, social and economic benefits.

The new Future Generations Commissioner for Wales needs sufficient powers and authority to impartially scrutinise the work of the Welsh Government and public sector bodies in Wales to ensure that they adhere to the new Future Development Bill.

### **2. The general principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill and the need for legislation in the following areas**

#### General principles and goals

The CHC Group is committed to the idea of a sustainable Wales. CHC Group is generally satisfied with the general principles and goals of the Future Generations Bill.

CHC members will play an integral role in helping the Welsh Government meet its sustainable development wellbeing goals in Wales.

CHC Group members contribute significantly to the energy efficiency and continual improvement and investment of housing in Wales. CHC Group members will play a significant role in helping the Welsh Government meet its Future Generations well-being goals as they are integral in the economic prosperity and

recovery, health and developing attractive communities in Wales. The Welsh Government did not provide any objectives, outcomes or timeframes for meeting the 6 wellbeing goals. CHC Group suggests that to ensure that the Future Generations Bill is a success; the Welsh Government needs to set specific objectives against each goal. Each objective needs to have realistic targets and outcomes that can be measured effectively.

The goals need to be scrutinised by the Welsh Government, public services boards and the office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.

The Welsh Government needs to consider developing local and regional sustainable development objectives alongside overarching objectives within each goal. Wales has a unique geography with different demographic needs. Each region should have its own sustainable development objective based on local and regional gaps in provision and need. These could be developed and fed into the overarching objectives within each goal.

The Welsh Government needs to set guidelines for local public services boards to scrutinise each objective and goals set against local targets and initiatives. The public service boards will be responsible for measuring progress towards achieving well-being goals and reporting on progress of each objective and outcome.

#### Future Generations Commissioner for Wales role, powers, responsibility, governance and accountability

The new Future Generations Commissioner for Wales should have the same powers and responsibility as the Older People and Children Commissioners for Wales. The Welsh Government needs to set new legislation to ensure the new Future Generations Commissioner for Wales post is able to scrutinize and if necessary penalise public bodies efficiently.

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales should be able to criticise the Welsh Government and the bodies on which the duty will be placed. The commissioner office will be crucial in providing some kind of performance benchmarks. Without these performance benchmarks, it may well become very difficult for many senior staff to understand and know what it is they actually need to do to prepare for being subject to the Future Generation duty.

The new Future Generations Commissioner role should have similar governance structure as the Older People and Children Commissioners for Wales and should be accountable to the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Government. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales should be scrutinised by the National Assembly for Wales within a designated committee, for example the Environment and Sustainability Committee.

We believe that the most useful function of the proposed new Future Generations Commissioner is to be the sole source of sustainable development advice and support in Wales. CHC Group are concerned that there are currently a great many sources of information on sustainable development and the practical measures that organisations can take to become more sustainable. These are reinforced by an ever-growing body of regulation and legislation.

#### Establishment of statutory Public Services Boards

The Bill aims to establish Public Services Boards to assess the economic, social and environmental well-being of areas.

Although Housing associations are exempt from the Future Generations Bill, they play a large role in the economic, social and environmental well-being of areas in Wales. Housing associations are about far more than bricks and mortar. They play a significant role in the economic, social and environmental role in communities in Wales. Housing associations play a key role in community regeneration and development, investing heavily in regeneration and employment in Welsh communities. Many housing associations provide supported housing to vulnerable people and are providers of not for profit care. They have a substantial impact on tenants' health and wellbeing.

Many of our members have built strong links with Local Service Boards and Local Health Boards to deliver a variety of services. This has included, for example, collaborations to collocate primary care services with community centres and learning centres, extra care facilities housing GP surgeries, reducing delayed transfer of care and reducing the amount of "out of county" placements.

For these reasons Housing associations will have a key role to play on any public service board.

It is however, unclear from the consultation:

- Whether the new Public Services Boards will complement and work alongside Local Service Boards and Local Health Boards. Local Services Boards have been developed to ensure public services are effective and citizen focused, will these be replaced with the Public Services Boards?
- Who the Public Services Boards will be accountable to - the Welsh Government, Future Generations Commissioner or the public?

At Community Housing Cymru, we have sought to strengthen partnerships, and create opportunities by for example, launching a Health, Housing & Social Care network in addition to holding an annual conference dedicated to the topic of health and housing. This has to date involved working closely with the Welsh NHS Confederation, the representative body for Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts in Wales. Through this close collaboration we have shared expertise and brought our respective members together to consider the challenges and opportunities at hand in jointly serving communities' healthcare needs. Going forward the network will provide a stage to share best practice and expand this to other areas to realise the full benefits across Wales from successful projects operating in certain areas of Wales.

CHC are happy to provide the committee with further written evidence on the great work the HA sector is doing in supporting the key areas of sustainable development, including regeneration, economic development and health and well-being.

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