

National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee
WFG 78
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill
Response from One Voice Wales

General

One Voice Wales is recognised by the Welsh Government as the national representative body for community and town councils in Wales. It represents the sector on the Local Government Partnership Council and some three-quarters of the 735 community and town councils are already in membership, with numbers growing year on year. As well as our representative role, we also provide support and advice to councils on an individual basis and have previously launched, with Welsh Government support, a modular training programme for councillors. We believe strongly that community councils are well-placed to develop the economic, social and environmental well-being of the areas they serve and, as such, are active and proactive in debating key issues such as energy policies, environmental issues and strategic planning. Our sector will support and wish to participate in much of the locally based aspects of the proposed developments as a result of this legislation, and it is hoped that our members will increasingly be enabled to do so as time progresses.

One Voice Wales agrees with the notion of putting sustainable development at the heart of government and fully supports the impetus to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of our communities. We believe that it is essential for public authorities to take the lead in relation to the principles and practices involved in this programme and, other than the sheer practicality in relation to capacity in very small local public bodies, we would hope and expect our sector councils also to take on these issues enthusiastically. Where applicable, this approach would include the setting and monitoring of goals and outcomes which would provide members of the local community with tangible indicators of progress.

In particular, One Voice Wales agrees with the need for a Future Generations Commissioner, with a clearly defined role and clear objectives.

Specific reference to community councils

In relation to section 7.5, One Voice Wales notes that in reference to section 5 community and town councils are deemed to be appropriate to be subject to the Bill. It would have been helpful if community and town councils (qualified) had been listed in the table presented under section 5 in the explanatory memorandum.

One Voice Wales agrees absolutely that the wide range of different sizes inherent across the spectrum of community and town councils in Wales makes it almost impossible to frame a common regime of responsibilities for all councils in the sector. And it is probably correct that the smaller local councils be omitted from any demands that look similar in nature to those placed upon public bodies with much larger profiles such as unitary authorities or national parks.

One Voice Wales is comfortable that the legislation stemming from this Bill should be limited to those community or town councils that have an income or expenditure of £200,000 or more for the three years preceding the publication of the local well-being plan for their area. It is presumed that this limit will be amended by acceptable amounts as time progresses. The sector should be included in any consultation relating to these potential changes.

In relation to the proposal to absolve the specified community councils from setting and reporting on their own objectives and to provide instead a requirement for them to contribute to the objectives included in the local well-being plan of the Public Services Board for its area, One Voice Wales has no general objection. It would seem sensible for small public bodies to be tied to the partnership working implied by this proposal, and local councils would surely contribute well in respect of the purpose of this Bill provided that they be fully engaged and involved in the work of the Public Service Board when such objectives are set in the first place.

The reporting requirement outlined in relation to the above structure is also supported as a natural extension to the contribution made generally towards the aims of safeguarding the well-being of future generations.

Dr. Del Morgan
15th August 2014