

Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Swansea Council Response

Further to the email dated 12th October 2020 regarding consultation on Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015; Swansea Council would like to make the following observations;

- 1. Q1. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications.**
- 1.1 Overall, there is a good level of awareness of the Act and its implications, although this varies within the Council. However, more could be done by Welsh Government and the Future Generations Commissioners Office (FGCO) to make the implications and implementation of the Act less complex and more understandable and practical to implement. Our view is that there appears to be a general lack of awareness of the Act and its implications amongst the general public.
- 1.2 There are limited national communications materials, other than the Megan video, that can be used to communicate the Act within organisations and to the general public; especially when, for example, compared to the Social Services and Well-being Act 'Get in on the Act, campaign. The burden of providing training on the Act has also fallen to individual public bodies where there are limited funds and resources provided or available following years of austerity to provide widespread training. It would be helpful if the Welsh Government and FGCO provided training materials and resources, including training videos, as well as Impact Assessments and example/best practice templates for action in ways of working and key corporate areas for change.
- 1.3 Public bodies are not always assured that the Welsh Government, Audit Wales and FGCO necessarily understand the level of resources and other support required for public bodies to communicate and implement the Act, its realities for change and its implications – especially when public bodies, especially local authorities, have been subjected to years of austerity, increasing demand and copious amounts of new legislation and duties to shoulder so that they no longer have the capacity or bandwidth that was once available.
- 1.4 A unified message and approach to expectations and support from Welsh Government, Audit Wales and OFGC is generally missing, nor is the expectation that the Act should be universally applied, which leads to a perception in social care, for example, that it is secondary to the Social Services and Well-being Act. A unified approach to communicating realistic expectations regarding the Act's implications and providing the necessary resources and support would be helpful.

2. Q2. The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed.

2.1 Public bodies and partnerships are not always assured that the Welsh Government, Audit Wales and FGCO necessarily understand the level of resources and other support required for public bodies to communicate and implement the Act, its realities for change and its implications – especially when public bodies have been subjected to years of austerity, increasing demand and copious amounts of new legislation and duties to shoulder so that they no longer have the capacity or bandwidth that was once available. Welsh Government and FGCO needs to be more active in supporting public bodies and partnerships by providing funding and more national guidance / templates, training and communication materials, as well as more guidance on ‘how’ to implement the Act rather than just ‘what’ to do to implement the Act. There are too many instances where 22 local authorities are all each working separately on trying to implement the Act; there are some instances where a single national and common approach would be beneficial, e.g. a nationally developed Future Generations Impact Assessment.

2.2 With the exception of limited revenue funding to support administration of PSB’s there is no additional funding made available by Welsh Government to support the work of the PSB and the delivery of the Well-Being plans. The burden for administering and co-coordinating the PSB and its work also falls disproportionately on local authorities with no additional funding or support. This is in stark contrast to Regional Partnership Boards (RPB) where central funding is made available to support the development and delivery of RPB work. PSB regional funding is unwieldy and equivalent funding for a co-ordinator servicing each area would have been more effective. The Well Being and Future Generation Act does not include policing as a listed public body and as such the Police have no resource to support implementation of the act.

3. Q3. Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner.

3.1 The Commissioner has provided some tools and documentation to help support the improvements public bodies, such as the Future Generations Report 2020, Journey on Involvement and feedback on a Self-Reflection tool. Overall, the communication and correspondence the Council has received as a public body from the FGCO has been limited although we do recognise that the FGCO does have a relatively small team. Representatives from the FGCO’s office have attended some PSB meetings however this is fairly sporadic in nature.

3.2 There also needs to be better alignment between Welsh Government, Audit Wales and FGCO advice. There needs to be a focus on practical advice for public bodies and for corporate areas for change within public bodies. Materials need to be streamlined, easily accessible, not duplicated. (There are literally dozens of Journeys – only accessible by clicking down – you can’t see the overview, same with Future Generations Report). The frameworks are resource intensive and assume large budgets, which don’t exist. The materials provided for public bodies and PSBs are limited and what is available can be time

consuming and difficult for practitioners to navigate and identify the advice applicable to their service. There is confusion / duplication between the roles of the FG Commissioner and Audit Wales; it is not clearly understood why both are needed and what their respective roles and responsibilities are, which can be counterproductive in garnering support for the Act.

4. Q4. The leadership role of the Welsh Government.

4.1 We do believe that there could be a clearer leadership role undertaken by the Welsh Government in relation to the awareness and promotion of the Act. There does appear to be a disconnect between Welsh Government and the FGCO. There also appears to be very little public references to the Act in terms of Welsh Governments work at Ministerial level during public announcements. Clear Leadership from Welsh Government is needed at present, which needs to be top down not bottom up; it is Welsh Government that sets out the frameworks and legislation that public services and PSBs must follow and in terms of setting funding terms, performance criteria, framing national procurement policy etc. Welsh Government could do more to lead unified and common national approaches to the Act. Welsh Government representatives do attend some PSB meetings but this is not always consistent across all PSB's.

5. Q5. Any other barriers to successful implementation of the Act (e.g. Brexit, COVID, etc.).

5.1 Whilst the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be realised there is a general expectation that public sector funding will be subject to further efficiencies. This, in addition to a decade of austerity, would clearly impact on the successful implementation of the Act. We believe it to be too early to establish the impact from Brexit at the present time. The perception of the Act being just another competing policy demand when it could be the methodology to manage the competing policy demands in an more efficient way if the necessary leadership, resources, guidance, clarity and support was provided to PSBs and to public bodies by Welsh Government and FGCO.

5.2 There is confusion / duplication between the roles of the FGCO and Audit Wales; it is not clearly understood why both are needed and what their respective roles and responsibilities are. The FGCO should be supportive and enabling and should not seek to micro-manage or enforce, which is counterproductive when winning hearts and minds, e.g. the FGCO could produce and deliver training on the Act, which would be both helpful and supportive. Audit Wales should have no role at all in regulating or enforcing the Act when much of the implementation is cultural and subjective. Audit Wales should instead focus on their traditional role to assess value for money and probity in the use of public money. The Audit Wales Future Generations audits do not add significant value to the process. Audit Wales undertakes a deep dive on a single step to meet any Well-being Objective and try to look for ways in which the public body in question has complied with the Act through a detailed examination of that single step. The approach appears contrived and subsequent reports pretty much say the same thing – public bodies are working

in line with the Act but could do more. A better approach, assuming Audit Wales have to retain a role, would be to avoid dedicated audits on the Act and instead examine the application of the Act in broad terms looking at value for money and probity in the use of public money through all of their other audits.

- 5.3 The number of strategic partnerships, some with competing remits, is a major issue for public sector organisations within Wales. Similarly, the lack of hypothecated and core funding available to PSB's, in comparison to other strategic partnerships, has certainly reduced the effectiveness and speed of delivery of PSB Well Being plans. There is little evidence of pooled budgets to deliver Well-Being plans and as such organisations often operate independently without exploring opportunities for collaboration.

6. Q6. How to ensure that the Act is implemented successfully in the future.

- 6.1 There needs to be joined-up working and clear unified messaging from Welsh Government, Audit Wales and OFGC. There needs to be a principles-led light touch approach with guidance, resources and support offered as a platform to build upon. Root messaging around the Act needs to be based on pragmatic, realistic and practical approaches and low resource solutions, which change culture over time. The aim should be to streamline and not complicate, offering a clear pathway forward that simplifies and does not muddle, complicate or confuse. Welsh Government needs to provide clear leadership, funding and resources and nationally developed solutions where that makes sense; the FGCO must provide more practical and pragmatic guidance and support and encouragement, and; Audit Wales should integrate the Act into their existing work and focus on value for money and the use of public funds and avoid dedicated 'audits' on what is subjective and cultural change. Above all, there needs to be a realistic assessment and expectation around what can be achieved over a sensible timeframe with diminished resources and increasing demand.
- 6.2 For PSBs it is crucial that core funding is made available. Access to available funding streams will enable for the pooling of knowledge and resources by working collaboratively across partner organisations to the benefit of our local communities and future generations, together with the ability to adopt 'one-off' financial support to ensure some initiatives get off the ground as part of embedding long terms goals for shaping and sustaining communities of the future.

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