

## **Welsh Public Accounts Committee Consultation on the Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

### **Response from Conwy County Borough Council**

**November 2020**

#### **1. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications.**

1.1 Conwy County Borough Council held a series of workshops across the organisation to ensure that all staff and elected Members were aware of the Act, its goals and the authority's obligations under the legislation. There is a dedicated page on the intranet explaining the Act. The Corporate Plan is framed round the Well-being Goals and all reports to democracy must explain how the report supports the Act. An update on the Act is provided in the annual report. When the Act was published a project team, chaired by the CEO, was established to ensure that all changes required were implemented.

1.2 However, as yet there is not a full integration of the priorities of the PSB with the priorities of all the PSB members' organisations. This was not helped by the lack of synchronisation in legislation between public sector requirements to have well-being plans and the PSB well-being plan timeline.

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

2.1 The focus of Welsh Government support for the Act has focussed on PSBs. There has been good support from the Welsh Government PSB team in the form of regular meetings and updates.

2.2 The PSB grant has been for the North Wales Region and has been very prescriptive – mainly to focus on the assessment of wellbeing. This lack of flexibility has meant that the grant has not always been spent in full. The PSB very much wanted to move onto implementation of projects and the terms of the grant did not permit this. Therefore owing to budget cuts and staff capacity, this has limited the work the PSBs actually want to focus on or pilot to make a difference. This frustration with inflexibility has been fed back to Welsh Government.

2.3 The assessment of wellbeing is a logical process in order to develop long term goals, but there is too much emphasis on it and not enough scope for a regional or national approach resulting in duplication of effort across PSBs and a substantial amount of officer time allocated. Other partnerships are also required to undertake assessments and whilst information is shared, it does feel as if the legislative requirements encourage working in silos owing to differing requirements and timescales. The needs assessment results in a huge piece of work which serves to affirm the priority areas the community and PSB members had already considered of importance, however once it is then published, it is not looked at again until it is statutorily required to do so. Officers have asked Welsh Government if for this round, consideration is given to a more efficient way of doing this work. This consideration of a regional or national approach is vital for implementation this time. Since the last needs assessment, all organisations have seen significant budget cuts and a reductions in research teams personnel. There will be

significant capacity issues to do this work on a local level and owing to Covid, a lot of data sets have not been published this year.

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

- 3.1 The Commissioners' office has produced a significant amount of information and recommendations. They are a friendly approachable team but contact is limited and mainly by email/ newsletters and focussed at an officer level rather than senior managers. Whilst they recommendations and ideas are all worthy, it has reached the point where it is overwhelming and does not appear to acknowledge the financial pressures organisations are under to make cuts. There are several layers of frameworks and recommendations and it is not always clear what should, and what is feasible to apply. Some reports have been of such considerable length (800 pages) or in such a format (journey checkers) that work has taken place by agencies to make sense of the salient points - which the Commissioner's office have then asked for. Some of the ideas and good practice would be fantastic to pilot, but set against a backdrop of significant year on year budget cuts, they are often beyond our reach. Even if the output would be a real benefit, all new projects need the upfront funding to develop, project manage, and implement and this requires an injection of funding.
- 3.2 The support provided is by email and most correspondence is about telling PSBs what action to take rather than providing support. Owing to the commissioners' office capacity, feedback on annual reports was only published when the next year's annual reports had been written, making it too late to incorporate suggestions.

### **4. The leadership role of the Welsh Government.**

- 4.1 We have had regular attendance from a Welsh Government representative at the PSB. This has just changed to a representative from CIW, which is helpful to make links with Social Care partnerships. However we need strong links to feed issues into Welsh Government and feedback to the PSBs. The role needs to change from an observer that of a close advisor and strengthen links back to Welsh Government.
- 4.2 It feels that Welsh Government themselves still have a way to go to embed the principles of the Act in to their own ways of working and to work in an integrated way with other legislative requirements, and therefore feed this into their approach to policy decisions and requirements from Local Authorities. Given that we are to look to the longer term, the annual funding cycles do not assist this shift in mindset.

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

- 5.1 The different legislative requirements has resulted in a complex map of partnerships and legislation which can lead to conflicting or out of synch timescales, and a lack of clarity as to what difference the PSB can make.
- 5.2 Covid has required a significant multi-agency response and has shown the vital role local government plays in community resilience. As a result PSB meetings were cancelled. However this is not to imply that collaboration did not occur, rather that it took place through the emergency planning TCG and SCG frameworks. The PSB has reassessed priorities in light of Covid. Owing to capacity PSB priorities have been on hold but is starting to recommence now.
- 5.3 It's been difficult for the PSB to forge a unique role for itself, as there are many other statutory regional partnerships in place whose reason for being is aligned to some of the priorities PSB

recognises (e.g. mental health, economy). This may be further exacerbated with the introduction of CJs. This serves to make a complex landscape with some agencies having to sit on a variety of the same partnership boards just in different counties.

5.4 It is still unclear what the implications of Brexit will be, but it is evident it will result in legislative changes and tariffs.

5.5 The timeline for reviewing our well-being needs assessment may still be too early to understand the impact of Brexit and Covid.

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

6.1 There needs to be greater co-production rather than the current 'inspection and regulator' relationship. There needs to be less prescriptive, longer term flexible funding which pump primes ideas and encourages new initiatives to be tested.

6.2 There needs to be great clarity between the different legislative requirements and complex partnership landscape, so that each partnership is clear about their purpose.