

## **South Wales Fire and Rescue Service Response to the Call for Evidence on Barriers to the Successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. To support the call for evidence on Barriers to the successful implementation of the Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2012 it would be meaningful to provide an introduction to South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) and how the Service is working towards the ways of working (WoW) and goals of the Act.
- 1.2. SWFRS has a proud history of working collaboratively and in a targeted risk based manner to deliver prevention, protection and response activities to those at risk across our communities, our mission is to make South Wales safer by reducing risk. The Service is working across many projects and sectors to reduce the risk in our communities. Working collaboratively with partners, analysing where the risk exists and developing early intervention, education and prevention initiatives.
- 1.3. SWFRS is continuing to develop different ways to engage, boosting our social media capabilities, developing networks in our communities and working collaboratively with partners in public and private sectors. This has been significantly impacted by COVID-19, but has enabled the Service to exploit technology to continue to engage with our communities and maintain a contact with one another at our remote work locations across South Wales.
- 1.4. As a Service we recognise our most valuable asset is our people. The Service has a strong culture of learning and development for both operational and corporate staff and is continuing to develop in this area. [The Strategic Equality plan](#) identifies how the Service seeks to build on its success and becomes an employer of choice from currently underrepresented groups. As a public service we are proud to serve all of our diverse communities, and we tailor our services to those that are most at risk.
- 1.5. We are increasingly mindful of the impact of our activities on the environment and are looking to reduce the negative impacts. SWFRS has published its [Carbon Reduction Plan 2020 - 2023](#) and will soon publish our Biodiversity Plan.
- 1.6. We are constantly scanning the environment to seek ways to improve our ICT systems and equipment available to conduct our activities. In recent years we have launched a new website and developed an internal Business Information System, we continue to improve our CORE HR system and look for ways to use technology to ensure operational personnel have the most up to date risk information on known premises and risks. We are aiming to maximise technology more effectively in all aspects of our business. These developments have accelerated during COVID 19 with significant improvements in the availability of technology and new systems being used across the Service area.
- 1.7. The Service is a statutory and active partner of the nine PSB's across our Service area. We actively use this opportunity to be more effective in supporting our community's needs and seek opportunities for collaboration. We have and continue to actively seek opportunities to collaborate on estates management (several of our locations are multi agency occupied).
- 1.8. The annual planning process continues to evolve. The Service carries out a SWOT Analysis and Gap Analysis against the Welsh Governments National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities, WBFGA and PSB plans. We review and update future trends analysis and reports and potential impacts on the Service and the communities we serve. Additionally, the Service reviews statistical data and intelligence of past performance. We hold a planning workshop with the Senior

Management Team and Executive Leadership Team and regularly monitor assurance metrics.

- 1.9. The Service has begun a pre-engagement cycle with key stakeholders prior to reviewing our plans and objectives. This early consultation elicits what is important about our Service with various people in South Wales, including staff, public and partners. The survey ran for three weeks and closed August 2020. A key priority next year will be the implementation of the Socio – Economic Duty that Welsh Government was due to commence on the 29th September 2020. Due to Covid-19, this duty has been re-prioritised for the 2021/2022 financial year. We are preparing our Service in readiness for this duty and ensuring that our plans, objectives and decision making reflect this new requirement placed on us. There is Scrutiny of the plan and objectives carried out with the Fire authority. The proposed objectives are subject to public consultation.
- 1.10. The Services ten year strategic plan is available. [Our Strategic Plan 2020-2030](#) introduces new longer-term strategic themes and explains how we intend to continue to deliver high quality services that meet the needs of our communities now and in the future.
- 1.11. The Business Management Information System has been developed so that we can map each of the actions supporting the objectives against the WGFBA WoW and also the Goals, in addition to other plans, actions and objectives that we are also required to work to. When setting the business plan actions the action owners are asked to consider which WoWs and Goals the action supports. We are ensuring that consideration of the Act is taken at the planning, formation and action setting stage.
- 1.12. SWFRS is fortunate that the ethos of the organisation in education and preventative work means that we already have strong partnership working practices that now are being fully supported by the Act.
- 1.13. The main strengths we believe are the fact that SWFRS has at its heart the aim of early intervention, education, prevention and youth engagement, the adage of prevention being better than cure is so true. Our activities range from working with young children in schools, children at risk of offending, our work within the criminal justice system and prisons, as well as working with the many vulnerable members of our communities. We run engagement programs in communities with multiple generations of unemployed, our Fire Cadets Schemes, as well as our community safety work and our wider support of local charities and community action is often undertaken in staff's own time. This work has forged extremely strong partnerships with partner agencies and community groups, families and individuals.
- 1.14. The general challenge for SWFRS is the challenge of providing the service we do across the 10 unitary authorities we cover, each with very differing needs, requirements and risks. The involvement of the 9 PSB's is welcomed and vital in this work but brings its own challenges with capacity and in minimising the bureaucracy and satisfying multiple and varied demands and needs of our diverse communities. This is not something that we shy away from, in fact we welcome this, but it causes resource and capacity issues for the Service, many of the PSBs are focussed on smaller local authority areas and not on the wider community.
- 1.15. We believe that in SWFRS we are contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals by taking reasonable steps to meet our well-being objectives and that we are working in ways that are consistent with the sustainable development principle.

2. The call for evidence key lines of enquiry have been addressed individually in the paragraphs below:

### 2.1. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications.

- 2.1.1. There does not appear to be local independent reporting around how successful individual organisations are performing against the Act (in response to the annual reports that they have produced) – each organisation’s audit of their performance against the Wellbeing Act appears to be self-generated and specific feedback to each organisation has been limited. It is suggested that adopting an approach similar to Audit Wales of specific organisational feedback would be of benefit to individual organisations to assist in their development of embedding the legislation and its principles.
- 2.1.2. There is an absence of common performance indicators and targets for organisations to report their performance against e.g. staffing, which makes measuring performance and benchmarking difficult.
- 2.1.3. Absence of a recognised reporting requirements framework for the annual Wellbeing reports limits each organisation’s ability to tangibly evidence and measure the extent of any positive outcomes.
- 2.1.4. Seminars, events and even audit reports appear to still be championing the virtues of the Act, as opposed to providing guidance of how to deliver measurable outputs against the Act.
- 2.1.5. Some organisations serve geographical areas that cover several PSBs – the priorities of PSBs are often conflicting, which could cause these organisations to lose sight of the overarching purpose of the Act.

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

- 2.2.1. There exists a significant issue around the ability of organisations to effectively plan and implement the Act due to the difficulties with the current annual budget setting cycles. Long term planning becomes problematic when there is little certainty over the longer term availability and sustainability of adequate budgets. This has become even more of an issue given the current level of public spend as a consequence of Covid.
- 2.2.2. The political cycles of the organisation are possibly less of an issue for the Fire & Rescue Authority, although the potential for member turnover from each constituent LA can be an issue. This has impacts upon the knowledge and experience members have of the Authority and its responsibilities where turnover is regular (eg. annual).
- 2.2.3. There is a lack of data sharing, which is proving to be a challenge, with some organisations being more willing to share relevant data to assist with effective service delivery to those who most need it than others. It is hoped that revised WASPI agreements that are being developed will positively assist in this, although cultural issues may require some prioritisation to ease transition.
- 2.2.4. There has been no additional fiscal support made available to engage in delivering outcomes via the PSBs that are not part of an organisation’s statutory outputs.
- 2.2.5. Capacity to adopt additional work streams as part of the PSBs, under the creation of a large number of wide ranging subgroups, places a strain on time and resources and also limits the availability and consistency of officers attending

sub-group meetings/work. This is particularly relevant when covering a large number of PSBs as we do. A more regional approach may assist in this.

2.2.6. Linked to the above point, it is uncertain at the current time whether the introduction of Joint Committees will assist or whether they will become an additional layer of complexity to deal with in addition to the PSBs.

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

2.3.1. Requests for communications and correspondence are often short notice and can be onerous – the reports that require comments and responses are also often significant in length.

2.3.2. A number of different members of staff from the Commissioner's office expect responses to consultation while limited guidance is provided and there is often little time to complete each consultation.

2.3.3. Reports from the Commissioner's office are generally very lengthy and very generic in nature, making it difficult to pull out key points for a particular organisation. Shorter, more succinct reports, along the lines of Audit Wales reports would be preferable, to include a general themes report and then short specific reports tailored to each organisation.

2.3.4. There appears to be a very limited understanding by staff at the Commissioners office of how public sector organisations work along with the constraints we are expected to work within. Perhaps the allocation of a lead officer for each organisation may assist, so that relevant sector experience can be learnt by the Commissioners staff (again, akin to the approach that Audit Wales take).

### 2.4. The leadership role of the Welsh Government.

2.4.1. The Welsh Government clearly support the Act, however some of the things that we want to achieve as a Nation need to be enabled by fundamentally changing the focus to that of the longer term, particularly releasing public services from the annual budgetary cycle, enabling a longer term facility for financial planning and stability for long term achievements to be made.

2.4.2. A more joined up approach on information gathering and reporting would also prove beneficial. Currently, we are often asked for information or reports from both organisations which generally are very similar with only moderate differences, but often several months apart. The amount of information required is often substantial and therefore can take a considerable amount of time to generate, particularly when the data required is not statistical but rather narrative in nature. A single combined approach to requests would reduce the organisational impact considerably.

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

2.5.1. Different partners within PSB's have differing priorities under a narrow/wider geographical boundary, which limits the ability for cross - boundary working. Consideration of a more regional footprint may assist in a focus on key strategic priorities and more joined up service delivery. This is particularly pertinent for partner organisations that already work on a regional or national footprint.

2.5.2. Some PSB Wellbeing objectives are not always applicable to all partners and therefore involvement in these objectives becomes limited in this situation.

2.5.3. Sharing of data is proving to be a challenge. There are examples of GDPR still being used as a reason not to share data. Some national protocols on sharing of

data between organisations would assist to ensure consistency across the board rather than a regional lottery.

- 2.5.4. The uncertainty of the impacts of Brexit remains and this additional challenge will be addressed as needed. However, there will remain some uncertainty for a period on the fall out for the public sector and the potential financial and resource implications this could create at a time when budgets and staff resources are already under considerable pressure
- 2.5.5. COVID-19 – As a critical service, it has been possible during Covid to maintain our key statutory services to our communities, albeit in modified form. The pandemic has accelerated some changes to the way we deliver services and the way we carry out business, although it is accepted that the restrictions on face to face contacts may have had a disproportionate effect on some of our more vulnerable communities. This could either be as a result of lack of digital platforms or due to vulnerabilities in these communities which prevented such contacts. As we move through the winter, it will be incumbent on us as a Service to evaluate and devise new and innovative ways to reach these communities to improve their outcomes. Partnership working is likely to be key to this, although it is acknowledged that our partners are all at different positions in their level of recovery and organisational priorities at the current time.
- 2.5.6. WG Elections – it is unknown at the current time what the outcome of the forthcoming WG elections will be and therefore this may or may provide additional opportunities or barriers to the implementation of the Act.
- 2.5.7. Staff & Other Resources – streamlining the process of requests through the Commissioner’s office for organisations providing reports and data would assist considerably in internal staff resources required to facilitate this. This is especially important given the increased absence rates caused through Covid and the growing requirement for narrative data sets rather than numerical or statistical datasets. It would also be beneficial if reports provided to Authority meetings, published on the website or provided to other regulators were considered by the Commissioner’s office before requests for the same or similar data were made.

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

- 2.6.1. Making it clear how the 2020-2025 defining challenges outlined in the audit report May 2020 will be monitored and assessed over the coming years and what data and information will be required.
- 2.6.2. Creation of case studies and benchmarking information would be useful
- 2.6.3. Encourage a more regionalised approach to PSBs and where appropriate a more joined up approach between PSBs and the new Joint Committees
- 2.6.4. Improve the profile and understanding of the PSBs amongst the public. Move to consistent data collection and reporting wherever possible and where objectives allow.
- 2.6.5. Encourage the PSBs to deliver a robust agenda that defines what success looks like and provides clear direction to sub groups on resources, outcomes and reporting.
- 2.6.6. A dedicated budget for organisations and partnerships to bid against for specific work programmes and projects that support the Act and provide tangible community benefits.