

## **Response from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority to the review by the Public Accounts Committee in the “Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

### **Introduction**

The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review by the Public Accounts Committee into the “Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015”. The Authority were early adopters of the Act and have reviewed and amended its work to meet the requirements of the Act. In addition, the Authority is represented on the Pembrokeshire Public Services Board.

The Authority recognises that the full impact of the Act will not be seen in the short term and consider that the public bodies implementing the Act need to be given time to fully explore the potential of the Act. While the Act came into being in 2015, there was a challenging process over the first two years to develop a local Well-being Assessment and to agree the Local Well-Being Plan, which was only completed in 2018. Therefore organisations have only had two years to implement the actions of the Local Well-being Plan. It could be argued that anyone thinking that the Act was going to lead to significant change in the Welsh public sector over this two year period had a limited understanding of both the Act and the Welsh public sector. While it is useful to review progress, we would question whether it is too early to undertake a meaningful review of the implementation of the Act.

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

In terms of the Authority, there is a good understanding of the Act and its implications amongst Members and staff. The Authority was an early adopted and undertook an extensive internal communications process to ensure that there was a clear understanding of the Act. The Authority’s Corporate Planning was amended to take account of the architecture of the Act, with outcomes aligned to the Well-Being Goals and a clear understanding of how different work programmes are delivered through the Five Ways of Working. Committee papers make reference to how a decision is impacted by the Act. Therefore from an internal perspective all Members and staff should have an understanding of how the Authority is seeking to deliver against the requirements of the Act.

However, this is different to truly understanding the potential of the Act to make a significant impact on our work and the National Park and its communities. There is an element of trial and error with this and over time the Authority will improve its understanding of the benefits of the Act.

If we consider the question from an external perspective, then the situation is more mixed. When compared with other legislation the awareness amongst stakeholders of this Act is high, however, the understanding of the Act is far less. The Act is often used to justify and lobby for a favoured course of action, without an understanding of how the Act is implemented.

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

The Authority does not receive any specific resources to deliver the Act, however, considers it needs to allocate its resources both financial and non-financial giving due consideration to the Act.

The Authority has changed its corporate planning process to align it to the goals of the Act. However, as is required its budget is presented according to CIPFA Codes, although we do include a section in our Corporate and Resources Plan highlighting how much money is allocated to each of the goals.

The Act has not led to a significant change in how public bodies budget or any significant movement in creating shared budgets across different organisations. However, this occurs at a small scale when different organisations come together to work collaboratively on projects. Due to the funding constraints on the majority of PSB members it is not surprising that much progress has been made on shared budgeting.

The Regional Partnership Boards, which have a number of similar functions to Public Services Boards, have had an opportunity to bid for significant funding through the Welsh Government's Integrated Care Fund. This will create a culture of joint working and shared budgeting and could be model considered for PSBs.

Until 2020, PSBs benefited from funding from the Welsh Government to support a Regional Co-ordinator. However, that funding was discontinued in 2020. With work commencing on developing a new Well-being Assessment it is unfortunate that this valuable resource will not be supported.

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

The Future Generations Commissioner has provided significant support and challenge to public bodies during the early years of the Act. There is a regular stream of documents, advice and feedback on some reports. These provide a wide range of ideas and suggestions on ways of working. While the information is very useful the scale of the information provided makes it difficult for the public bodies to fully engage.

The Commissioner may benefit in having a more regular dialogue with public bodies and PSBs to identify what support they require and tailor the support provided to the needs of public bodies and PSBs.

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

Public bodies receive regular correspondence from the Welsh Government on the Act and the Welsh Government has regular promoted the Act.

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

While there are specific events such as Brexit and Covid that will impact on implementation, the Act will provide a framework on how we can respond to some of these challenges.

While the Well-being of Future generations Act encourages long term thinking, the funding cycles for public organisations a much more short term. The Auditor General noted in his report “Findings from the Auditor General’s Sustainable Development Principle Examinations,” May 2020 - “Short term funding and late notifications remain a reality. There are some examples of grants being merged and flexibility being increased. The Commissioner is recommending that, starting with Welsh Government, financial planning should move to a model of well-being budgets and remit letters to national bodies should be reformed so that they are set in a longer-term context.” (<https://www.audit.wales/system/files/publications/Well-being-of-Future-Generations-report-eng.pdf>” p.15). While the timescales of Welsh Government budgeting and funding is often influenced by other factors such as the timing of UK Government decisions, efforts to provide long term budget information would assist organisations in taking long term decisions.

Until recently National Park Authorities, along with Local Authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities were required to meet the performance requirements of the Local Government Measure. This required the publication of Improvement Objectives that were often short term in focus. As a consequence of this it was challenging for public bodies to meet both the requirement of the Act and the Measure. While the recent passing of the Local Government and Elections Bill has provided the means to dis-apply the Local Government Measure, and we believe this will happen from April 2021, provision to undertake this could have been included in the Act, rather than waiting for five years.

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

The Act is in its early days of implementation and public bodies and PSBs are still working through how to implement the significant change the Act seeks to achieve. In view of this there should not be any large scale change at this time.

While local public bodies fit into a local architecture based on the PSB, the Well-being Assessment and Well-being Plan, it is harder to see how organisations functioning on a national level (with the exception of Natural Resources Wales) fit into this way of working. Consideration could be given to how organisations such as the National Museum and Arts Council can contribute to and benefit from working with organisations working on a local or regional footprint.

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