

Carmarthenshire Public Services Board Response to the Senedd Public Account Committee Inquiry

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

We welcome the opportunity to submit the views of Carmarthenshire Public Services Board (PSB) to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into the views on the barriers to the successful implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We have outlined our views to each key point below but would like to emphasise that in order for PSBs to fulfil their potential there is a need to invest resources and capacity at a local level in order to drive the work of the PSB forward.

1 Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications

- 1.1 There is a good level of awareness and understanding of the Act amongst PSB partners, and especially within member organisations who are themselves subject to the Act as individual public bodies. All of the PSB partners contributed towards the development, publication and implementation of our first well-being assessment and plan.
- 1.2 Embedding awareness of the PSB within all public sector organisations, especially within areas not directly involved in the PSB, is challenging. This is a particular challenge for those organisations are not subject to the Act themselves.
- 1.3 In general, the public's awareness and understanding of PSBs is limited. However, as the public will better understand the role and responsibilities of the individual member organisations of the PSB, we would ask the question if the wider general public need to have a high level of awareness of the PSB? PSBs have a duty to ensure they are open and transparent and we publish all relevant documentation, so if anybody wants to know more about the PSB the information is available, but raising general awareness and understanding isn't something we currently have capacity for.
- 1.4 On-going communication and involvement will be key going forward to ensure levels or awareness and understanding in terms of the role of the PSB is increased. Undertaking a refresh of the well-being assessments during 2021 will aid this.

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

- 2.1 The Act stipulates that local authorities should undertake the secretariat and development role for PSB but no additional resources have been committed for this work. It therefore fell upon existing officers to undertake the duties. With budgets within public organisations so stretched it has not been a viable answer to seek a contribution of costs towards dedicated staff from PSB member organisations, especially when considering many partners are members of multiple county PSBs.
- 2.2 The lack of dedicated resources to support the work of the PSB is holding it back and means that the PSB cannot currently fulfil its potential.

- 2.3 When comparing the PSB to other regional structures such as the Regional Partnership Boards, they are very much the poor relation. The key element that is missing for the PSB is the ability to have a dedicated team of staff to take its work forward. Allocated funding to support this could see the unlocking of significant potential by working with PSB member organisations to do things differently and deliver new ways of working. This dedicated resource is essential if the PSBs are to fulfil the potential that the Act offers.
- 2.4 Additionally, national bodies such as Data Cymru could be supporting PSBs by providing a core data set for each PSB area, updated on an on-going basis which could then be used as a baseline locally to aid the measurement of progress.
- 2.5 If more is being asked and expected of PSBs, they need to be adequately resourced to do so.

3 Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner

- 3.1 Support on the wider implementation of the Act has been very forthcoming from the Future Generations Commissioner, however we would argue that specific support to PSBs has been limited. When developing our original assessments and plans it was more of a challenge role rather than a support role and since then direct engagement with PSBs has been limited.
- 3.2 The work on publishing the Future Generations report will be very beneficial in terms of future planning and supporting the refresh of our well-being assessments and plans.

4 The leadership role of Welsh Government

- 4.1 The PSB officer network supported by Welsh Government is beneficial and is a great way for PSBs to share best practice and common areas of challenge or concern.
- 4.2 At times however, it is felt that broader understanding across Welsh Government of the role and responsibilities of PSB could be strengthened. There have been some examples of Welsh Government programmes and guidance referring to the need to ensure the PSB is engaged in different matters but with no direct communication from Welsh Government to PSBs on this expectation.
- 4.3 The PSB could play a significant part in responding to a number of significant societal challenges that public bodies at a national and local level are facing at the moment including how we respond to the climate emergency, poverty, inequalities and economic growth to name a few. However, there needs to be a greater understanding at Welsh Government of how public bodies can work together to respond to these challenges and also an investment of resources into PSB to enable this to happen.
- 4.4 COVID-19 response has demonstrated the inter-dependencies between different public bodies in Wales and there is scope to further develop this going forward rather than returning to business as usual which would tend to be more siloed.

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

- 5.1 One of the key barriers for us locally, is fully understanding and avoiding duplication and contradiction when responding to different legislative requirements which sit alongside the Act, such as the Social Services and Well-being Act, Environment Act and others. This is an element that Welsh Government needs to give further thought to as at times the integration between such requirements is lacking and we have to make sense of the different requirements at a local level, when we have less resources than Welsh Government to do so.
- 5.2 With the introduction of the Local Government Bill and establishment of Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) that work to different footprints than usual public sector collaboration (for us in West Wales in particular) there is a danger that many PSB partners could be pulled in different directions i.e. Health Board and Police will straddle two different CJCs in our area.
- 5.3 However, the lack of dedicated resources to fulfil the potential of the PSB is the main barrier to successful implementation of the Act.

6 How to ensure the Act is implemented successfully in the future

- 6.1 Clear direction and commitment from Welsh Government in the continuation of embedding the Act is required. Whilst being fully appreciative of the need for challenge and scrutiny of how things are going, in the first few years since the Act was introduced there have been several inquiries or calls for evidence into the way in which organisations are embedding the Act but also particularly around the role and function of PSBs. Greater collaboration on these types of enquiries would be beneficial.
- 6.2 There is a strong commitment by individual partners to the PSB and collaboration in general. Since the start of the pandemic many PSB members have noted that the relationships and trust they had built by working with the PSB over a number of years had supported their response to COVID-19 as they knew who to turn to in different public bodies in order to get matters where there were inter-dependencies resolved as quickly as possible. There is also a strong belief that we could be achieving so much more by working together and that in order to address the challenges we're currently facing, the best solution is to work together.