

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

Response from Pembrokeshire County Council to the Senedd's Public Accounts Committee

1. Thank you for giving Pembrokeshire County Council the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry on both the Auditor General for Wales' and the Future Generations Commissioner's statutory reports.
2. Due to the pressures of COVID-19, the Council has not been able to give either of these reports the attention that we would normally do and we suspect that this will be the case for many other public organisations. Our response to your call for evidence is based on our role as a public body rather than as a member of a public services board.

Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications.

3. There is a good degree of awareness of the Act amongst Members and Officers, particularly the seven national well-being goals and the five ways of working. The Council has undertaken training with Members on the Act and has extended training on the impact assessment process (which includes the requirements of the Act) to both officers and Members. All decision making committee reports include a section on the Act.
4. There is general awareness of other aspects of the Act, such as public service boards, but not all Members and Officers associate the PSB with the Act itself or make a distinction between the Council's role in partnership working
5. As previously mentioned, we have put on training courses on the Act including some of the more challenging aspects of it, such as thinking about the future. We are less confident that there is a widespread, understanding of the Act particularly the need to balance present and future need rather than just highlighting actions that may have a benefit for future generations.
6. Members and officers generally recognise that the Act inter-relates with other pieces of legislation, such as the Social Services and Well-being Act, the Equality Act and the Environment Act. In general, there is a more limited understanding of how fundamental the Environment Act is in protecting bio-diversity and promoting low carbon and it is possible that some Members and Officers confuse which duties are in which piece of legislation. There is also a more limited understanding of the difference between the rights based approach within the SS&WBA and the implications for it has for involvement and engagement compared with the WoFGA.

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

7. Whilst the Council has been able to access resources from Welsh Government (WG), the Future Generations Commissioner's Office, Public Health Wales and the Wales Audit Office, the Council has not had access financial support to implement the Act. This is in common with the introduction of many other pieces of legislation.
8. The WG's Essentials Guide remains particularly helpful and five years on this still forms the basis of our internal guidance and training for members and employees.
9. Resources from Public Health Wales have helped drive the sustainability agenda forwards and have been welcome. The Futures conference co-hosted with the Commissioner's office in March 2019 was useful and has raised the profile of this work – in the Council's view, you can only balance current and future need if you have a better understanding of how the future may differ. We have been involved in testing the Sustainable Improvement for Teams (SIFT) tool which PHW is currently developing and this looks like it is practical and has lots of potential.
10. The Wales Audit Office WFG examinations were integrated into their other improvement work and offered constructive challenge. The programme of work took into account the time needed to implement the Act. Recommendations were developed alongside the Council. Whilst there was opportunity for dialogue, it also felt like a robust process.

Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner.

11. The support from the Future Generations Commissioner has been welcomed, though some initiatives, especially the self-reflection tool felt process-heavy.
12. The support materials from the Commissioner are well-produced (eg the Journey Checkers) though they can be lengthy and whilst thorough, would be more effective if they were more concise. The 800 page Future Generation Report 2020 report is another example of a report which has a lot of useful information but is difficult to navigate.

The leadership role of the Welsh Government.

13. We consider that Welsh Government has led the implementation of the Act effectively and that the Act is prominent in Welsh Government's work.
14. The WoFGA is one of a number of over-arching pieces of legislation introduced by Welsh Government that impact right across our services and how we engage and involve our stakeholders. There is a case for re-examining how this complexity is impacting on decision making processes and whether legislation could be simplified.

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

15. The impact of COVID is difficult to overstate. In most cases, this impact will be negative, though be accelerating some trends, it is possible that COVID will have some positive impacts in a limited number of scenarios. We consider that there is, depending on the type of trade deal secured, also potential for Brexit to cause social and economic harm. We do not underestimate either of these factors and the need to focus on addressing their short-term impact.
16. In the short term both Brexit and COVID will complicate the implementation of the Act by reducing resources in real terms and by diverting resources and priorities away from our well-being objectives. We consider that it is likely that inequality and poverty are likely to increase in the short term. The Council is a major employer and like all other employers, we are concerned about the impact that reduced social contact may be having on our workforce's well-being.
17. However, if a long-term and broad view is taken, we consider that they all focus attention on the need to think long-term; the risk of a pandemic was identified as a near certainty in futures planning (eg Global Strategic Trends). Futures thinking also highlights the possibility of countries working within a more multi-lateral and co-operative framework, or the opposite and Brexit can be seen in these terms. There are clear trends in well-being and mental health. They are all examples of change and successful implementation of the WoFGA will be a successful response to change.
18. COVID will change how people live, and how they work and where. The inevitable impact of this is that some of what we thought of as good practice examples will cease to be as relevant. New technologies will enable alternative best practice examples to develop. We consider that this reinforces the need to focus on the Act's primary duty of sustainable development – it is all too easy to get lost in the detail of good practice and forget that these are examples of how to achieve an outcome.

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

19. In our view, the key for successful implementation of the Act is returning to the sustainable development principle; development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is becoming clear that moving to a low carbon economy is essential in order that future generation's needs are not further compromised as well as to reduce pressure on bio-diversity and eco-systems. We consider that this offers an opportunity to simplify implementation of the Act and provide a sharper focus. There is a case for re-visiting the seven national goals to ensure that achieving a low carbon economy has the emphasis it needs.
20. The Act pre-dates Corporate Joint Committees and whilst some local authorities have used flexibilities within the Act to have joint PSBs, the local authority geography underpinning the Act is 22 Councils. We consider that opportunities within the Corporate Joint Committees framework to collaborate will be valuable

and that they will have an increased importance in economic development and shaping a low carbon economy. We consider the Act will need to evolve to take account of CJs including whether CJs should be identified as public bodies in their own right.