

[Providing advice and support to Public Services Boards on well-being planning](#)

Dear Public Services Board members and support teams,

I am writing to set out an approach to meeting my duties under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act to advise and support you in setting your collective well-being objectives and publishing your well-being plans over the coming year. Although this letter is addressed to Public Services Board (PSB) members and officers that support the PSB, please share this information with the officers within your organisation responsible for corporate planning, performance, scrutiny, sustainable development and any other officers you think might find this information useful.

As you are aware, I am offered two opportunities within the Act to influence and support your collective well-being planning this year. Firstly, Public Services Boards (PSBs) must seek my advice on how to take steps to meet their local objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle. I must provide my advice in writing and I have up to 14 weeks to do this. Secondly, I am one of many statutory consultees when you consult on your draft well-being plan later in the year for a minimum of a 12-week period. The Act sets out that these two processes should be separate from one another, which allows me to engage with you at the critical time when you will be considering the steps you may want to take in meeting the objectives by using the sustainable development principle.

This letter describes in some detail how I see my role and that of my team in the following broad areas of support and constructive challenge:

1. **Continuing the conversation:** building on the relationships my team have established with you to find a way together of using the maximum 14-week period to our benefit.
2. **Acting as a 'connector':** using the themes emerging from the ongoing assessments of well-being as a guide to connect you with other partners and provide a fluid programme of support that helps your PSB to collectively plan for well-being over the coming year and into the future.
3. **Recognising and removing barriers:** working with you to understand how I am best placed to assist in removing barriers that are getting in the way of you effectively using the Act.

I know from conversations with PSB members, co-ordinators, support teams and other public / voluntary sector officers that many of you have begun considering your draft objectives as a PSB and your organisations will have set their own well-being objectives and published a statement of well-being. In preparation for this coming year, I want to take this opportunity to clarify some points around setting well-being objectives:

- **See the Act as helpful** - I have spoken many times about the Act not becoming a 'compliance-based' exercise. By this, I mean that we truly have an opportunity to challenge the way Wales works to create a better future for our nation and you should see the Act as a helpful vehicle in challenging the way decisions are made, as a framework for planning and evaluation, and as a method of changing the way the corporate centres of your organization currently operate. This is

not an easy task, but showing strong leadership and a willingness to change is vital; and setting your well-being objectives is the first direction you will give to your organization under the Act.

- **Use the lens of the Act** – by this I mean that objectives should be arrived at by using the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working to shape your thinking. This should be the starting point to setting your objectives, rather than simply focusing on the seven well-being goals or the national well-being indicators.
- **Maximise your contribution to the seven national well-being goals** – the Act states that objectives should be integrated i.e. you should consider how an objective impacts or could impact on each of the goals. If you have used the five ways of working effectively, this might prompt you to consider how you need to collaborate with others and involve 'unusual suspects' to meet the objective and maximize your contribution to the seven goals.
- **Be targeted** – well-being objectives should not be based on 'business as usual', encompassing everything that public bodies need to do individually or collectively. It might be helpful to you if you set out the wider context of why you have chosen a particular objective over other activities in your statement and your well-being plan. I have said previously that focusing deeply on a smaller number of issues and using the lens of the Act to look at them differently, could have a transformative effect on the well-being of people in Wales.

My team have been recently involving PSB members, co-ordinators, support teams, Welsh Government, Wales Audit Office and other public / voluntary sector officers to understand the best way of approaching this coming year to enable you to get the most benefit out of the advice and support offered to you. Based on what we have heard so far, this letter is intended to provide you with an indicative overview of my approach for this year, in the time leading up to publishing your first well-being plans and I would encourage you to let me know if you have other suggestions of how to make this period most effective and useful to you.

I want to emphasise again that this is a learning process, with PSBs and my own office working towards the long-term goal of better public services for the people of Wales now and for future generations. I am more interested in how you are adapting the ways in which you work together using the Act as a lens for planning, challenging and evaluating your actions, than a product that must be produced within a deadline. I hope you will agree that the approach I have set out below will support you in doing this and be of the most benefit to members and teams in PSBs across Wales:

1. Continuing a conversation:

The work that you continue to do on assessing the state of well-being locally has, arguably, been the first test of the Act being applied in practice. I have been in the privileged position to see all the assessments and have recognised the phenomenal amount of effort you have put into their development in my feedback to you. Although I am a statutory consultee for well-being assessments and well-being plans, there is no legal obligation for me to respond. But, we chose to provide a detailed and challenging response to give

you the best possible resource for your well-being planning, at a time when we feel it can have an impact on the next steps you take.

My team have reflected on the approach we have taken so far in working with you and discussed this with you at recent meetings, events and through the relationships we are building. Responding to the well-being assessments has given me the opportunity to think about the best way to meet my duties in advising you for the coming year and beyond the publication of the first well-being plans, to enable you to get the maximum benefit from my role as guardian of future generations. I want to thank you for your contributions to these discussions and say that I have been encouraged by your ideas.

Firstly, it is clear that you would value an ongoing conversation with my team as you draft your collective well-being objectives and consider how to take steps to meet them; rather than an exchange of documents at the beginning and end of a 14-week period. You have rightly recognised that this opportunity to seek my advice differs from the formal consultation period on well-being plans and it is important we have an ongoing conversation, which allows you to continue to informally involve others in the work to draft your objectives and the steps to meet them during these 14 weeks - rather than 'downing tools' and waiting for my response to continue writing your well-being plan. Nevertheless, I am required by law to provide you with a written response within a 14-week timeframe of you seeking my advice.

As a small team, continuing this conversation is a real challenge and we have asked for your input on how we could resource this fairly. So, on a practical level, I ask that you seek this advice over e-mail (contactus@futuregenerations.wales), providing me with your draft well-being objectives, any initial thoughts on the steps you might take to meet these and the most appropriate contact in your PSB support team to liaise with in responding.

On receiving your initial e-mail for advice, a member of my office will contact you to discuss your work to date and arrange a follow-up teleconference or, where possible, a face-to-face discussion at a midway point in time that is mutually convenient. These conversations will help me in forming the written advice I provide to you at the end of the 14-week timeframe.

You have rightly said that my response will not be helpful if the advice is out of context to your PSB and the context within which you work. Therefore, my team will build on the feedback we have provided and the recent relationships we have formed in responding to your well-being assessments, which will help me to understand how you are seeking to use the lens of the Act to work together differently. I believe this will be the best way to provide you with useful advice on the steps you might take to meet your objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle.

You have told me that the drop-in sessions provided by Welsh Government during the process of drafting your assessments were very helpful. Therefore, we will also be considering delivering drop-in sessions at different points in the year, to provide you with an opportunity to discuss your continuous assessing and planning face-to-face. We will seek to align this with the drop-in sessions provided by Welsh Government, where possible.

I am keen to run live social media chats with you at critical points during the year to continue our conversation over this period and I will also be asking you as PSBs and other partner organisations to share learning through blogging on our website and contributing to events.

2. Acting as a 'connector':

Secondly, you have told me that I can play a valuable role as a 'connector'. I am in the fortunate position of having a 'helicopter view' of activity across Wales and my team continue to gather evidence of practice nationally and internationally. Working with partners, I am keen to connect PSBs with each other and with people who may have innovative solutions to their areas of focus.

Our partnership with Cardiff University has enabled us to gather information that will form an overview report on common themes, opportunities and challenges coming from your experience of assessing well-being. One of the first things I want to do is to connect PSBs with each other, with national bodies and academic contacts that can support them and with other organisations working to the Act. As such, I am hosting a joint event with Cardiff University to launch the overview report, share the learning that we've gathered and connect you with one another on Monday, 5th June 2017. I am also building partnerships with other academic institutions to help grow the knowledge base to help PSBs develop and deliver their well-being plans.

My team will also be working with Welsh Government and other partners to get the most benefit out of upcoming events, network meetings, conferences and meetings to meet with you and provide a fluid programme of support. This will continue beyond 2017/18 and is intended to support you in applying the sustainable development principle in the context of your PSB. This will include:

- Signposting to evidence that may help you in setting out the steps you intend to take to meet your objectives;
- Signposting to tools that aim to assist you in adopting the sustainable development principle, using the five ways of working and considering how you maximize your contribution to the seven well-being goals;
- A series of webinars and 'concept labs' that will be focused on the themes and challenges emerging from the well-being assessments, in the context of helping you to collectively plan for well-being.

I hope that the webinars and 'concept labs', in particular, will be a safe space to test ideas, share learning, compare experiences and discover opportunities for collaboration on particular emerging issues.

3. Recognising and removing barriers:

Thirdly, many of you have come to me with barriers that are getting in the way of applying the sustainable development principle, the five ways of working and maximising your contribution to the seven national well-being goals. These barriers are varied and I am keen to understand what these barriers are and how I might be best placed to assist in removing them (or work around them!).

I have been travelling to PSBs around Wales to meet you and my attendance at your meetings so far have reaffirmed my view of the importance of PSBs and the critical opportunity they provide. The leadership provided by PSBs is central in grasping this opportunity to challenge the way Wales works to create a better future for our nation. There is a great potential to recognise shared challenges, shared agendas and the logical need for collaborative and collective recognition of priorities and pooled resourcing.

I am also picking up that each PSB has their strengths and their weaknesses. These are varied, but I am clear that members should be taking an active role in setting the agenda for their PSBs. They should not be passively listening to presentations or nodding-through information reports, but need to become a place of difficult conversations, a forum where issues are worked through and where partners are called out if they are resisting a change to the way they do business together.

I would encourage you, therefore, to be as honest as possible with me and my team so that I can provide advice to PSBs and other bodies on removing or overcoming any barriers to working towards the well-being of our future generations.

I hope you find this outline advice and direction helpful. I will be making further information available through my website (www.futuregenerations.wales) over the coming months but, as always, I would welcome your views on this, please e-mail contactus@futuregenerations.wales if you have any concerns, queries or comments.

Kind regards,



Sophie Howe

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales