

Gwent Public Services Board: Well-being Assessment

Feedback and advice from the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales,
31st January 2022

1: Summary

- A comprehensive well-being assessment with a strong, clear evidence base.
- Well presented with a helpful introduction section. The introduction pages at the beginning of each of the main chapters are also useful in providing an overview.
- All four dimensions of well-being considered in substantial detail, with many links and connections between themes made throughout the report.
- An honest and reflective appraisal of data and information.
- Good use and mixture of types of data and information (quantitative and qualitative).
- Section 3 (below) highlights some areas that if further developed, would help to strengthen the assessment. These relate to: a summarised narrative, future trends, equality, involvement, the Welsh Language, accessibility and navigation and maximising your contribution to Wales' well-being goals.
- Section 3 also outlines other (desirable) areas for consideration within the assessment.

2: Evidence of good practice in the well-being assessment

Process and methodology

We recognise the extensive time, work and energy that's gone into your move to a regional PSB and in producing a joint, comprehensive well-being assessment. As you state, moving to a regional PSB is an opportunity to simplify and strengthen existing partnership arrangements and it's positive to hear you say: *'the focus is on doing more of what matters – improving well-being.'*

It is clear the assessment has considered a wide range of local, regional and national sources to evidence the current state of well-being in Gwent, alongside past and future trends. The assessment demonstrates an effective use of quantitative data combined with qualitative insights, and consideration of wider context to identify what the likely implications are, for example, of biodiversity trends, on both people and planet.

The introduction chapter and section on involvement provide a useful overview of the engagement techniques and lines of questioning used. The approaches to ensure the research was accessible, and that it reached a wide range of respondents, are particularly positive. This includes the use of multiple languages such as Urdu, Arabic, and Polish; providing paper copies of the survey distributed in public places; using social media; and engaging with existing groups (e.g. youth forums). Virtual responses were also used in some cases, important due to covid restrictions, but also allowed engagement with those who may feel more comfortable communicating in this manner.

It is positive time has been taken to consider learning from the approach taken in the last round of assessments. The methodology section outlines that stakeholder mapping exercises built upon those undertaken in 2017-18, which means the assessment is able to give an overview of how community groups and stakeholder organisations have shifted in the last five years. It is also good to see you refer to and reflect on the existing 24 well-being objectives, and your recognition of the opportunity in this cycle to determine if they are still the right ones for your communities.

There is honest reflection on the impact of the pandemic throughout, highlighting the potential of it to increase existing inequalities. For example, the assessment acknowledges how the pandemic caused disruption for some engagement events, such as closed libraries, less face-to-face engagement exercises taking place and not being able to reach schools due to lockdowns. Similarly, the assessment acknowledges that relying solely on online conferencing tools can exclude some people, such as those without the required technology and/or with slow internet connection.

There is good evidence of joined-up thinking throughout the assessment and it's positive to see the connections made between the four dimensions of well-being. For example, highlighting the negative impacts of a changing climate (in relation to fuel poverty) in the 'Social Well-being' chapter. It's also good to see the evidence gathered for this assessment being used to inform wider strategies and plans such as the Policy and Crime Plan 2022-26, and the Population Needs Assessment.

We welcome the identification of gaps within the data, and future research needs. It demonstrates a rigorous interpretation of the available evidence. For example, the environment chapter lists 'gaps in understanding' with the recommendation they are considered in development of the Well-being Plan. Similarly, the report states there is a significant gap around intersectionality of gender-based violence with race and ethnicity, and we welcome the acknowledgement of this gap and commitment to addressing it going forward.

Content

Future trends are considered throughout the assessment, within each of the main chapters. These effectively link up different topics and their implications on well-being. Examples include the impact that an ageing population might have on demand for housing, or how shifts in the workplace are likely to change demand for skills. These are directly linked to wider strategies and research undertaken locally, nationally, or UK-wide.

The assessment's work on environmental well-being is to be commended. Alongside the standalone chapter, which includes detailed scientific analysis of pressing issues for the PSB and their impact (e.g., loss of habitats and risks to biodiversity), environmental well-being is tied into each chapter as a common thread. For example, the economic impact of renewable energy projects on Gwent is considered in-depth in the economic well-being chapter. Similarly, the environmental well-being chapter is excellent at joining elements of the natural environment to other aspects of well-being. For example, the Brecon Beacons National Park as an asset to the tourism industry is considered alongside the role sustainable agricultural management has in adopting low carbon approaches to land management.

The structure of the assessment, by the four well-being dimensions, risks discussing each aspect in isolation from each other. However, this is not the case as the assessment clearly and consistently links up issues throughout. For example, discussion of fuel poverty makes links to both health and environmental wellbeing, in the review of how sustainable energy measures can be harnessed to alleviate this challenge. Similarly, it discusses the challenges of ensuring land use for windfarms does not negatively impact biodiversity.

It is positive the assessment explores how the PSB is supporting and engaging with community driven initiatives within Gwent. This crosses a range of well-being dimensions within the report. For example, the cultural well-being chapter discusses the impact of volunteering in developing 'cohesive communities'; while in the environment chapter it explores the development of Community Flooding Plans which are led by residents and supported by NRW.

The assessment clearly outlines innovative approaches being taken to address some of the key transport challenges facing Gwent. For example, how the PSB are trialling a scheme called Fflecsi buses, where passengers can be picked up and dropped off by request. Similarly, the listed strategic development sites outline four projects such as the ULEV Taxi 'try before you buy' scheme to encourage take up of electric vehicles among taxi drivers. This is alongside honest reflection of the ongoing connectivity issues within the area, and how this changes depending on whether you live in a more rural or urban area, and proximity to Cardiff and associated transport links.

3: Areas that could be further developed

Important areas for consideration

Building on the extensive work already you have already undertaken for your well-being assessment, below are areas we consider to be important for your consideration. If developed further, they would help strengthen the assessment overall.

A summarised narrative

The draft well-being assessment is both detailed and comprehensive in terms of the information and data it sets out. It gives your PSB a strong foundation from which to build upon. It is also helpful that an executive summary has also been shared, which provides a useful overview of key statistics, and highlights key challenges and inequalities within the region.

Building on this, the assessment would benefit from the inclusion of a short, summarised narrative that draws on all of the detailed information and data set out in each of the chapters, but goes a step further in reflecting on what it means for Gwent, both now and in the future. This could be in the form of a set of broad, overarching headlines for well-being in area.

Given the extensive nature of the assessment, it is appreciated you will have to consider how best to use your available resource to respond to feedback and finalise the document. However, this would help benefit members of your PSB to have a clearer understanding of the broad challenges to well-being in Gwent, across the four dimensions of well-being. It would also benefit anyone else who uses the assessment, including organisations and residents.

Future trends and challenges

It is reassuring to see how you have considered future trends throughout the assessment. This includes not only using and referencing longer-term information and data, but going further by exploring 'Future Trends and Challenges' within each of the main chapters, and what they might mean for your area.

The assessment also demonstrates consideration of future trends across the four dimensions of well-being. For example, the section on housing includes a good overview of the future trends and challenges, making links between decarbonisation, a changing climate, thermal efficiency, flooding and renewable energy to housing need, prices and projections. This is good practice other PSBs could learn from.

To build on these strengths, it would be helpful to understand how the PSB intends to continue to consider and embed future trends information into its next steps, including the development of a well-being plan and setting of objectives and steps. Collaborative working focussed on the 'long-term' is challenging but futures techniques are effective tools for engaging with others and

prompting constructive discussion in a way that can help develop plans that deliver meaningful change.

In your introduction, you highlight that you have developed a shared understanding of the inequalities that exist within your communities, and how these might change in the future. Consideration of the potential implications on inequality is necessary when making decisions to tackle future trends. Our recent report with Public Health Wales '[Inequality in a future Wales](#)' is a helpful resource in this area. It highlights the future of work, changing demographics and climate change could increase existing inequalities if the impacts on different groups in society are not factored in.

Looking ahead, we also encourage you to consider how different people and population groups living in your communities may be differently affected by future trends, and actively involve those people to ensure their voices are being heard in your discussions and decision-making. A better understanding of their concerns and priorities for action will help you plan your next steps.

Equality

The assessment provides analysis of the ageing population of Gwent, estimating that there will be an additional 10,615 people aged over 85 by 2043. There is some consideration of how this may affect the economy. Building on the information already presented, the assessment could also consider the impact on demand for social and unpaid carers, and the potential effect on inequalities, e.g., higher rates of women's unpaid labour in the future.

We recommend ensuring all 'protected characteristics' outlined in the Equality Act are considered within the assessment. LGBTQ+ people are at a higher risk of negative well-being outcomes, such as with [mental health](#) and discrimination in healthcare. The assessment would be strengthened if their experiences could be incorporated. Ethnic and religious diversity is considered within the cultural well-being section, and could be incorporated elsewhere in the assessment. For example, there are well documented studies highlighting the intersection of health outcomes and ethnic inequalities (e.g. from the [Wales Centre for Public Policy](#)).

There is some consideration of gendered differences, such as by life expectancy, but this is not consistent within the assessment. It would be helpful to see an exploration of wider issues by gender, and any initiatives undertaken by the PSB to address inequalities in this area.

As highlighted above, our '[Inequality in a future Wales](#)' report explores future trends in relation to demographic change, the future of work and climate change. It is a helpful resource for considering the potential implications for inequality in these areas.

Involvement

From the information presented, it is clear the PSB has undertaken a variety of engagement methods and worked with a range of stakeholders. We value that the report takes time to outline commitments to working with organisations going forward to address evidence gaps, and in development of the well-being plan. The chapter on involvement is clear and provides honest reflection on the challenges faced during the research, such as engaging with seldom heard voices.

Looking ahead to the well-being plan, it is good to hear the assessment state (within the 'Continued dialogue with communities' section): *'It will be key that the Gwent Public Services Board implements a longer-term communications and engagement plan throughout the forthcoming well-being plan and, beyond 2023 to engage and involves communities and stakeholders in delivery.'*

With this in mind, are there lessons in your thinking and approach to involvement going forward that could be included within the assessment? For example, are you clear whose voices are not being heard? Are you exploring other approaches or techniques for engaging with seldom heard voices as attention shifts to the well-being plan? Have any accessibility issues been raised?

Using and adopting strong, innovative involvement techniques that go beyond engagement and move more towards co-production is important for all PSBs. To help inform the next stages of the well-being planning process, the Co-production Network for Wales is producing advice and guidance based on the way in which involvement and co-production has been embedded in the well-being process so far. We encourage your PSB teams and coordinators to help shape this guidance with Co-Production Network for Wales, as it develops.

Welsh Language

The assessment highlights all areas of Gwent fall below the Welsh average for Welsh speakers (based on 2011 census data).

It is not clear from the information presented if the reasons for this across the region are well understood. If work has been undertaken that explores this in more detail, it would be helpful to refer to this within the assessment. It would also be beneficial if the assessment included some analysis of the longer-term future of the Welsh language in Gwent, in conjunction with national level predictions and relevance to your area, together with any qualitative information on how residents feel about the use of Welsh and how it relates to their sense of identity.

In moving to setting objectives and steps within your well-being plan, clear links should be made to your relevant Welsh in Education Strategic Plans (WESP) and each local authority's promotional strategies. Connections could also be made between the Welsh language and skills and the economy.

Accessibility and navigation

The assessment is extensive, and we recognise the work that has gone into preparing the information and data within it. Below are some suggestions that could be taken to improve its overall accessibility and navigation:

- Providing an overarching contents page at the beginning of the document, and continual page numbers throughout the report.
- Adopting a consistent approach for the layout and structure of each chapter.
- Clear labelling and consistent formatting of tables and graphs.
- Providing a summary table of content for each chapter (as you have done in the environment chapter) to help guide the reader.
- Potentially enlarging some tables and graphs that are small and difficult to read (e.g., some of those in the environment and culture chapters).
- Moving all endnotes to an annexe, to reduce the overall length of the document.

Maximising the PSB's contribution to Wales' well-being goals

Understanding the full definition of Wales' well-being goals can help ensure the assessment is considering the wide range of topics and themes of well-being within your area.

The table below sets out areas that could be explored further within the assessment, and/or taken into consideration for the well-being plan. It is appreciated that it may not be possible for all the information below to be fully considered / incorporated in your assessment.

Instead, you may wish to choose some areas to compliment the extensive work you have already undertaken:

Agriculture and Brexit	The environmental impact of Brexit is covered in great detail, and there is some discussion of the impacts on agriculture within this section. Agriculture is a substantial sector to parts of Gwent, covering a range of goods. It is also relevant with regard to a loss of migrant labour and need for flexible working hours. The economic impact could also be considered within the economic well-being chapter.
The Foundational Economy	Positive the assessment discusses Welsh Government's move towards the 'Foundational Economy', and explores what this might mean for jobs in Gwent. Can any links be made with the Foundational Economy Challenge Fund?
Fair and local procurement	Local supply chains are a key lever for change and referred to briefly. Some further consideration and analysis in this area would help strengthen the assessment.
Community areas	The findings within the assessment are frequently broken down by local authority level. It would be helpful to occasionally go into some greater detail about smaller geographies within the region, if possible. For example, the assessment highlights how there may be 'pockets' of hidden deprivation within Monmouthshire. The perspectives of people living within these areas might be useful, and/or a comparison of how experiences of deprivation in some local authorities may differ or be similar to others.
Regional Skills Partnership	Not clear if links have been made with your local Regional Skills Partnership. Your assessment will be a significant resource for them. Similarly, their strategies and priorities will be key for your PSB.
Regional Economic Frameworks	The recently published ' South-East Wales Regional Economic Framework ' will be an important resource for your PSB.
Skills for the future	Positive to see this referred to within the assessment, with references to how future trends may affect demand for skills. Going further, the assessment would benefit from consideration of research and work undertaken already in



	<p>this area. For example, the South East Capital Region Skills Partnership skills plan and the work we carried out with New Economics Foundation to provide a summary analysis of the skills needed to transition to a low carbon economy. This finds that across Wales there are significant skills gaps in green industries which must be addressed.</p>
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Other areas for consideration (desirable)

These are areas you might wish to amend / update to strengthen the assessment overall:

- **Collaboration:** Building on the collaborative approach taken to developing the assessment in the region, it would be beneficial if the assessment identified *who* all the partners were and *how* the collaboration was managed. This information would help for future learning, as cross-sector collaboration is a challenging but effective means of delivering social change.
- **Presenting future trends and challenges:** Within the 'Social Well-being' chapter, future trends are explored at the end of each topic, e.g., crime, education, housing, transport and health. Elsewhere, they're explored at the end of each chapter, as a whole. For consistency, you may wish to consider adopting the same structure across the four main chapters. We also note there is a 'Future trends and challenges' header but no text in relation to health.
- **Typos and missing content:** There are several instances of headings without content (e.g. 'effects of covid 19' on page 104, unfinished sentences, some track changes, and unanswered questions (e.g. page 116). It is appreciated these are minor issues that will be addressed, and do not reflect the quality of the report's overall content.

4: Resources to help inform your next steps

Below are resources that can help inform your next steps, as you move from well-being assessment to well-being plan:

- Chapter 4 of the Future Generations Report: '[Setting Good Well-being Objectives](#)'
- The '[Future Generations Framework for Projects](#)'
- [Case studies](#) of how the Act is being implemented on the ground in Wales
- Office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales: [Resources](#)