



Comisiynydd
Cenedlaethau'r
Dyfodol
Cymru

Future
Generations
Commissioner
for Wales

A government fit for future generations

A Review into Welsh Government's
implementation of the Well-being of
Future Generations Act

Executive Summary



Overview

Significant progress has been made since the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 came into force and Wales set its commitment to sustainability into law - a brave step, which is commended internationally.

"What Wales is doing today; the world will do tomorrow."
United Nations

The aim and ambition of the Act has helped shift culture in public sector from silo working and short-termism towards a more integrated, long-term way of thinking, which considers the needs of both current and future generations. Welsh Government has shown ambition and improvement in the progress they are making towards achieving the seven well-being goals. However, there is more that must be done to achieve the ambitious vision the Act set out for Wales.

What is a Section 20 Review?

Section 20 of the Act gives the Future Generations Commissioner the power to conduct a review into the extent to which a public body is safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their needs when carrying out sustainable development.

The aim of this Section 20 review was to explore how Welsh Government applies the Act and meets their duties within the machinery of government. The review identified good practice and areas for improvement.

The key overarching findings I identified during this review are:

- The Well-being of Future Generations Act and the extent to which it has been embedded in the DNA of Welsh public policy development and delivery continues to be world leading.
- The reach of the Act, enthusiasm and commitment for what it aims to achieve has extended beyond those organisations who are covered by the legislation.
- Its success to date has resulted more from leadership and commitment than embedded processes.
- Clear leadership, continual communication and constant review will be needed for the Government to move successfully to the next phase of implementation.

This review was structured around three main features

People and Culture, Process, and Public Sector Leadership.

The more specific findings I identified across these three features are outlined in the sections below.

My recommendation to Welsh Government, is that:

Welsh Government should continue to take action to continually improve how the Well-being of Future Generations Act drives its work to support Welsh Ministers deliver their well-being objectives, act in accordance with the sustainable development principle and, by doing so, maximise their contribution to the national well-being goals. In doing so, Welsh Government should publish a plan, setting out the improvements they will make, which address the findings and areas of improvement outlined in this Section 20 Report.

This should include timescales for the delivery of actions and arrangements for reporting annually, monitoring, and reviewing progress, and how it will collaborate with others (including the Commissioner's office) to ensure that Welsh Government can remain at the forefront of the well-being of future generations agenda. Welsh Government should work openly with the Commissioner to monitor the progress of this plan. Welsh Government should report on the progress of this plan alongside their annual report.



People & Culture

Never was a truer word spoken than the old adage, 'culture eats strategy for breakfast'. In all forms of transformation, creating the right culture in an organisation is more important than any other aspect of delivery infrastructure.

In recent years, the Welsh civil service has faced unprecedented workforce pressures as it has had to work (and continue to do so) through multiple crises. I have seen excellent examples of where the culture of the organisation – guided by the Act - has led way Welsh Government has responded to challenges. There have been some excellent cases of innovation and resilience such as the creative freelancers fund and pledge, the Social Partnerships Council and the roll-out of Test, Trace, Protect. Now government must look at how they can build on this work and stretch further on the journey to sustainability.

Finding 1:

There is a sense of pride and enthusiasm in this world-leading legislation, but there is some discrepancy between the level of enthusiasm, commitment and a detailed understanding of application.

Finding 2:

There is a plethora of learning materials around the Act - while some material is good, Welsh Government should seek to better understand what works and build on innovative approaches being adopted in some parts of government.



There is a range of online materials with information on the Act, which officials can access, including an introductory pack and workshop on the five ways of working.

Welsh Government has developed a new '**Policy Capability Framework**' to support officials in developing knowledge, skills, and behaviours to implement policy in line with the Act. I have also observed and heard about a range of innovative ways to increase capabilities pioneered in different departments and teams:



The Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning department hold monthly lunch and learn sessions for teams within the department to get together to learn about areas of common interest.



Through Welsh Government funding for my Future Generations Leadership Academy, teams in government have sent representatives to be upskilled in sustainability and the Act.



Several departments have mentioned securing research fellows to undertake in-house research and help increase capacity within the organisation.

However, there are some gaps in these materials on certain elements of the Act and the more in-depth training on the Act is currently not mandatory, and only available to certain grades and professions. There are also capacity issues, with officials struggling to find the time for formal training, learning and development. Addressing this will be key to further embedding the Act and can help in the long-term to build flexibility in government as it faces new and complex challenges.

Finding 3:

There are concerted efforts to embed long-term thinking across government, but the need to respond to multiple crises and capacity are often seen as barriers to civil servants fully applying this way of working.

There are very good examples of Welsh Government stretching beyond considerations of current challenges and planning for the longer-term, such as: the Transport Strategy, *Llwybr Newydd*, and the Waste Strategy, *Beyond Recycling*, which look to 20 and 30 years into the future respectively.

However, other than the Future Trends Report, I have not seen any resources targeted at upskilling civil servants in embedding long-term thinking in their everyday work. Pressures of continual firefighting are holding back the ability for civil servants to practice and apply long-term thinking consistently.

Welsh Government colleagues have agreed with me that this is an area where improvements can be made; an internal futures workshop was organised between my office and the government, with the help of the School of International Futures. Opportunities to act further were identified in the workshop, and I look forward to working with Welsh Government to understand how these can be taken forward.



Progress Made in embedding the Act in People and Culture

Significant enthusiasm across the organisation for the Act and its aims

There are good levels of awareness of the Act, especially in policymaking teams

Recognition of need to develop and enhance communication around the Act

Increased leadership around the Act at political and official level

Key training materials like induction, policymaking training and basecamp etc. include information about the Act, particularly the module 'Policymaking in the Welsh context'

Development of the policy capability framework

Good examples of innovative approaches to increasing capabilities

Multiple good examples of applying the five ways of working and starting to think more long-term



Areas for improvement in embedding the Act in People and Culture

Build on work already in training development of a long-term comprehensive strategy for helping the civil service further embed the duties and elements of the Act

Improve communication on the Act internally and externally and link it to broader political and organisational narrative

Bridge the gap between awareness and understanding – identify areas of lower understanding from People Survey and address at that level by providing civil servants with time, and opportunity to learn about the practical application of the Act

Increase support for corporate teams to understand and apply the Act in practice and ensure sustainability is embedded in the seven corporate areas of change in the Statutory Guidance

Build on and share good examples across the organisation of an innovation and initiatives led by civil servants to embed the Act, (such as the good practice emerging in policymaking) to achieve results in other areas and professions. This should include both good practice and lessons learned

Improve clarity and transparency on what is achieved and what did not work in annual reports or elsewhere

Clarify the level or awareness and understanding of the Act according to job role and profession; and include a mandatory training element (such as 'Policymaking in the Welsh context' but adapted to different professions)

Help political leadership foreground the long-term in their dealings with policy teams, for instance by making the long-term explicit in relevant routine meeting

Improve knowledge and use of some ways of working like prevention and long-term

Improve opportunities for building capacity in futures thinking in government and better communicate the long-term impacts of policies along with the short-term

Ensure that there is a safe environment to try innovations that may sometimes fail but can be used as learning opportunities for the future

Process

There are a number of policymaking tools, approaches, and assurance mechanisms that show progress in the way government do things. Examples of this include their internal research programme and evidence for policymaking, their Integrated Impact Assessment, Ministerial Deep Dives, and the Permanent Secretary Responsibilities. There are, however, other areas where the assurance mechanisms have fallen short of demonstrating how the Act is being implemented.

Welsh Government shared multiple mechanisms they use to apply the Act in their processes. I have focused this chapter on 'Policymaking' and 'Accountability and Assurance' as these are critical areas, that can ensure the effective application of the Act across the organisation.

Policymaking

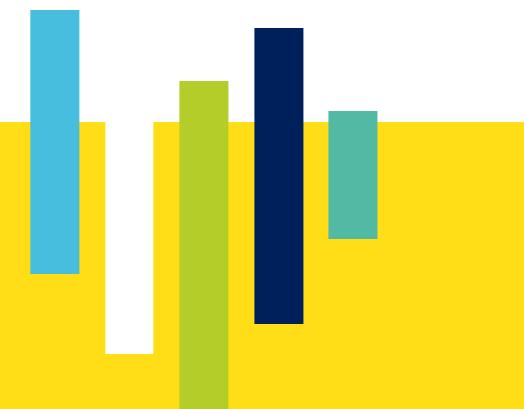
Finding 4:

The Well-being of Future Generations Act is driving changes in the ways policies are being developed, designed and implemented but it is not yet being consistently applied in a way which embeds all aspects of the Act, or across the whole organisation.

Policy teams are making efforts to apply the Act in the face of competing pressures and mounting workloads. I have heard that teams are continually assessing the wider impact of their policies on other sectors, and proactively making connections with other teams as a result.

My evidence has shown, however, that there is variation in how effectively different teams use the ways of working. Collaboration, for example, seems to be more easily understood and applied than prevention and long-term.

My review identified a range of policymaking tools (such as the Integrated Impact Assessment, Policymaking Guidance, the Policy Capability Framework, Consultation Guidance, Policy Training, and Ministerial Deep Dives), which contribute to the implementation of the Act. These tools have merit but, in some cases, miss opportunities to reference the Act and support its implementation. Some of them reference the Act as an additional duty, disjointed from others, rather than as a framework around everything that government does.



Accountability and Assurance

Finding 5:

Welsh Government have a range of accountability mechanisms in relation to the Well-being of Future Generations Act, but not all are utilised effectively.

It is a challenge for governments to develop effective 'process mechanisms' that check the application of relevant legislation during policy development, as well as the governance of the organisation more generally.

Positively, many accountability and assurance mechanisms, such as the Internal Control Questionnaire, the Welsh Government Board Terms of Reference, the setting up of a Board Champion, and the Ministerial Briefings have been updated to reflect and embed the Act. I consider some, but not all, to be reaching their potential. The predominant reason is that their effectiveness in practice has not been assessed. The level of understanding of those asked to provide assurance could also be developed further. While as general assurance mechanisms these might work very well, when it comes to assurance on the Act they need reviewing and strengthening.

One of the main challenges I have identified was understanding the complex accountability infrastructure that Welsh Government has developed around the Act. To my knowledge, no mapping has been done to clarify how all these accountability mechanisms integrate and interact with each other. Communicating this infrastructure and how it interacts can provide clarity and transparency and help Welsh Government ensure there are no gaps in its current accountability and assurance mechanisms.





Progress Made in embedding the Act in Process

The Business Information Reporting Tool provides a tool for reporting on well-being objectives and Programme for Government commitments

The Integrated Impact Assessment is world leading

Multiple good examples of the five ways of working being used in policymaking

Shadow board being supported to constructively challenge on how the Act has been applied

Integrated Act in key policymaking tools and guidance

The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee focusing on the Act

People's survey asking questions about the five ways of working



Areas for improvement in embedding the Act in Process

Review and test how well different tools and accountability mechanisms are achieving their ambition and helping to deliver the Act in practice. Some of these tools are:

- Business Information Reporting Tool to include sections focusing on long-term objectives, which can be incorporated into departmental team meetings
- Better integrate the five ways of working throughout the Integrated Impact Assessment
- Review how the Internal Control Questionnaire is used to provide an overall assurance on the Act

Consistent and more integrated reviewing and evaluation of policy needed to understand cumulative impacts on sustainability

Review and clarify the expectations of the Welsh Government Board Champion with a clear remit set in the Terms of Reference of the Board

Improve the flow of insight and assurance, as well as clarify the accountability and reporting lines between the Oversight and Enabling Group, Executive Committee and Welsh Government Board

Ask more searching questions in the People Survey

Public Sector Leadership

To achieve the vision of the Act, public servants from all public bodies need to be working together, and sharing best practice and lessons learned.

My role was created to support the implementation of the Act, to monitor progress, and to encourage best practice. However, as outlined on numerous occasions the ability of my office to support the scale of the change needed is limited due to resources. It is important therefore to recognise that Welsh Government has significant levers and resources at its disposal to drive the changes needed internally and externally.

Welsh Government has an important role to play as a national organisation, with powers to create legislation, guidance and policy that impacts public bodies, private and voluntary sector, and the general public – all of whom can contribute to the Act. It is essential that Welsh Government create the right conditions for new ways of working and leads the way for other public bodies in demonstrating how the Act can be best applied in practice. Welsh Government can also encourage application by sharing its resources, good practice examples and experience with others.

An important step has already been taken with the development and promotion of the One Welsh Public Service approach. This aims to have a single set of values, which were re-written to embed the Act, to guide how the public sector works and shape its culture.

Finding 6:

There is untapped potential for Welsh Government to work with the public sector and beyond to deliver the Well-being of Future Generations Act - to mobilise, promote good examples, create resources, and share learning.

It was encouraging to hear from external stakeholders that collaboration with Welsh Government has improved significantly. Welsh Government's engagement with the Sustainable Development Coordinators Cymru+ Network, Public Services Boards, and voluntary sector has particularly been highlighted to me.

The Well-being of Future Generations Multi-Stakeholder Forum and the Future Generations Exchange events have also been raised as useful spaces to talk about the Act.

However, some of the challenges that I have raised with Welsh Government in previous reports and advice (see Future Generations Report 2020) seem to persist. Funding challenges for Public Services Boards came across quite strongly in evidence sessions, as well as missed opportunities for Welsh Government to take a more active role as a partner and contribute regularly to the work of the Boards.

There is also more to be done to ensure that government is using the integration way of working as intended by considering how their well-being objectives and steps impact upon other public bodies.

The 'implementation gap' between policy aspirations and delivery has also come up during this review. In seeking to close this implementation gap, Welsh Government should be applying the five ways of working in how they design, resource, deliver and evaluate the implementation of policy. If this is done well and the ways of working are applied properly, throughout the lifetime of a policy, then many of the issues contributing to the current implementation gap can be addressed.

Beyond creating statutory tools and materials under the Act, Welsh Government also has a broader role in supporting other public bodies through sharing experience, expertise, evidence and data. There is a lot of good practice in government, which can be better shared with public bodies.

The One Welsh Public Service approach is a great opportunity to improve this and enhance collaboration and sharing of practice and learning between public bodies. The Act needs to be clearly present within the communications around this work to maximise opportunities.



Progress Made in embedding the Act in Public Sector Leadership

Collaboration with public bodies and Public Services Boards has improved a lot

Government is working well with external networks like the Sustainable Development Coordinators Cymru+

Well-being of Future Generations Multi-Stakeholder Forum is a useful space

One Welsh Public Service is a recognised and welcome brand

The Future Generations Exchanges are great events to promote the Act

International team and Grants Assurance Panel are great examples of how the Act should be used



Areas for improvement in embedding the Act in Public Sector Leadership

Clarify and refresh Welsh Government's Terms of Reference for Public Services Boards Representatives

Consider how to support Public Services Boards to achieve their ambitious purpose – e.g., review funding arrangements and current guidance to members to encourage more joint-up work and active participation

Improve the awareness and understanding of other public bodies' well-being objectives to ensure these are acknowledged - consideration of other bodies' well-being objectives is a part of the decision-making process

Co-produce policies with the people who will be implementing them to ensure challenges to implementation are addressed at the design stage

Support teams working with the private and voluntary sectors to better promote the Act and encourage others to use it

Find ways to underline the value of the long-term in policy discussions, for example around budget and in consultations

Conclusion

The introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations Act has placed Wales at the forefront of international sustainability efforts. The next step on this journey would now be to ensure that this change is ingrained deeply into the civil service – through its people and culture, its processes, and its role as a leader in the public sector.

This report outlines the key areas for improvement that Welsh Government can work on to speed up progress and build on the good practice that is already taking place.

I am, therefore, pleased that Welsh Government is planning to include and address all of these areas for improvement in their Future Generations Continuous Learning and Improvement Plan. I look forward to working with Welsh Government in the future to create a Wales fit for our current and future generations.

Accompanying this final report, I have also produced a maturity matrix that illustrates the steps I would like Welsh Government and public bodies to be taking to further advance on the journey to the seven well-being goals; and a glossary explaining the terms used throughout this report as these may not be readily understood by people outside of the Welsh Government and the civil service. You can find these products [here](#).



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