

# Delivering for Future Generations: The story so far

March 2021



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**Public Accounts Committee  
Welsh Parliament  
Cardiff Bay  
CF99 1SN**

Tel: **0300 200 6565**  
Email: **[SeneddPAC@senedd.wales](mailto:SeneddPAC@senedd.wales)**  
Twitter: **[@SeneddPAC](https://twitter.com/SeneddPAC)**

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# **Delivering for Future Generations:**

## The story so far

March 2021



# About the Committee

The Committee was established on 22 June 2016. Its remit can be found at: [www.senedd.wales/SeneddPAC](http://www.senedd.wales/SeneddPAC)

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## Committee Chair:



**Nick Ramsay MS**  
Welsh Conservatives

## Current Committee membership:



**Gareth Bennett MS**  
Abolish the Welsh Assembly  
Party



**Vikki Howells MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Delyth Jewell MS**  
Plaid Cymru



**Darren Millar MS**  
Welsh Conservatives



**Rhianon Passmore MS**  
Welsh Labour



**Jenny Rathbone MS**  
Welsh Labour

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The following Member was also a member of the Committee during this inquiry.



**Angela Burns MS**  
Welsh Conservatives

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Llyr Gruffydd MS attended the evidence gathering sessions (December 2020 – February 2021).



**Llyr Gruffydd MS**  
Plaid Cymru

# Contents

<b>Chair's foreword</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>12</b>
What does the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 do?	12
What is this inquiry about?	14
Why is the inquiry important?	14
Why now?	15
How did we carry out the inquiry?	16
<b>2. Awareness and understanding</b>	<b>20</b>
Defining what 'good' looks like	20
Culture change: awareness and understanding across public bodies	21
Charities and the private sector	23
The public	24
Our view	27
<b>3. Resources</b>	<b>30</b>
Whether public bodies have the resources they need	30
Funding allocation and budget cycles	33
The resources available to Public Services Boards (PSBs)	36
Our view	39
<b>4. The Future Generations Commissioner</b>	<b>43</b>
The Future Generations Commissioner's role	43
How the Commissioner has approached her work	44
Public bodies' views about the Commissioner's support	45
The Commissioner's resources	49

---



Our view.....	51
<b>5. The Welsh Government.....</b>	<b>54</b>
Leading by example: the Government as a public body .....	54
Promoting the Act .....	57
How the Act feeds into policy development.....	61
The complex landscape of legislation and partnership bodies.....	64
Remit letters.....	71
Public bodies that are not currently subject to the Act.....	72
Our view.....	73
<b>6. Other barriers .....</b>	<b>82</b>
Covid-19 .....	82
Our view: Covid-19 .....	85
The work of the Auditor General for Wales .....	86
Our view: the work of the Auditor General for Wales .....	90
Brexit .....	91
Our view: Brexit.....	92
Tensions between centralisation and localisation .....	93
Our view: tensions between centralisation and localisation.....	94
<b>7. A final word: the role of the Senedd .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Annex A: Key terms and phrases .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Annex B: Contributors to this inquiry .....</b>	<b>102</b>

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## Chair's foreword

When I compare where we are now, with the Covid-19 recovery phase within sight, with when we started planning this inquiry around a year ago, I am struck by just how relevant this body of work has become.

Although few people disagreed with what the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill set out to achieve when it was introduced to the National Assembly for Wales in 2014, many were sceptical about whether it was possible to implement sustainable development via legislation. Many still are.

Nevertheless, as we prepare to publish this report, scepticism is no longer good enough. We as a Senedd, and as a country, have a collective responsibility to reshape public services in Wales for the better.

We must learn lessons from how we have responded to Covid-19 and use this opportunity to shape a better future for generations to come. Implementing the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is a good place to start.

Although this report focuses on barriers, we have conducted this inquiry with a constructive underlying ethos: how can we make this Act work? Ultimately, making it work depends on everyone and every public body considered in this report. We must all do better.

Nevertheless, the responsibility for implementation falls more heavily on some than others. We have focused our conclusions and recommendations on the Welsh Government. There are recommendations too for public bodies collectively, the Future Generations Commissioner, the Auditor General for Wales and for the Senedd itself. We urge those bodies to receive those recommendations in the constructive spirit with which they were made.

## Conclusions

**Conclusion 1.** Public bodies have not done enough to build awareness and understanding amongst their service users of the shift to sustainable development across public services. ....Page 28

**Conclusion 2.** Public bodies have not done enough to change the culture of their own organisations to align with the principles of the Act. Consequently, the culture change that is essential to the successful implementation of this Act has not taken place. ....Page 28

**Conclusion 3.** Public bodies are yet to take full advantage of the expertise and capacity within the third and private sectors to support their work under the Act. Therefore, public bodies could realise additional benefits of working alongside third and private sector organisations to adopt the principles of the Act when they deliver services for and on behalf of the public service. ....Page 28

**Conclusion 4.** A lack of additional funding for public bodies to embed the principles of sustainable development and the five ways of working should not be a barrier to implementation of the Act. ....Page 40

**Conclusion 5.** Short funding cycles and late funding announcements have made it more difficult for public bodies to collaborate effectively, plan for the future, and make the most out of the resources they have.....Page 40

**Conclusion 6.** The inconsistent funding arrangements for Public Services Boards limit their effectiveness. Requiring each Board to separately overcome the same fundamental resourcing challenge is inefficient, has no clear justification and has led to undesirable inconsistencies in what Boards do and how they work.  
.....Page 41

**Conclusion 7.** The Commissioner and her office have developed a positive public profile and have effectively promoted and raised awareness of the Act. They have considerable expertise in sustainable development, which underpins the support and advice they provide to public bodies and the Welsh Government.  
.....Page 51



**Conclusion 8.** The Future Generations Commissioner’s budget has not given her office sufficient capacity to provide public bodies with the levels of practical and sector-specific support that they have called for to implement the Act.

..... Page 52

**Conclusion 9.** The Welsh Ministers were slow to implement and promote the Act in the years immediately after it was passed. Consequently, the Welsh civil service did not implement the Act well enough internally and did not make it clear to public bodies that it expected them to do so too. This has been a fundamental barrier to implementation, the impact of which is still evident across the public sector today. .... Page 73

**Conclusion 10.** Despite a slow start, the Welsh Government has made tangible progress in adopting the Act since around 2017. We welcome the emphasis that the First Minister and the Permanent Secretary have placed on the importance of implementing the Act successfully and are encouraged by structural changes made in pursuit of the Act and awareness raising activities within the Welsh Government. .... Page 74

**Conclusion 11.** The complex and bureaucratic landscape of partnership bodies and plethora of legislative and reporting requirements has made it more difficult for public bodies to adopt this Act and has, at times, actively disincentivised it.

..... Page 79

**Conclusion 12.** The uncertainty surrounding Brexit has undoubtedly made it more challenging for public bodies to plan for the future. However, the full impact of leaving the EU on Welsh public services is still unknown. .... Page 92

# Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government should carry out of a review of how it can provide longer-term financial security to the public bodies that are subject to this Act. This review should be completed in time to inform funding decisions in relation to the 2023-24 financial year..... Page 40

**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should carry out a review of how the work of Public Service Boards is funded. The review should begin no later than six months after the next Senedd election, with its conclusions implemented in time for them to inform funding allocations for the 2023-24 financial year. The review should be undertaken with the following principles in mind:

- PSBs should be able to access pooled funds, drawn from the resources of their statutory members, which they could either hold as formal corporate entities, or via informal arrangements.
- PSB budgets should be determined by clear, consistent guidelines set out by the Welsh Government.
- PSB budgets should be informed by the role that the Welsh Government has set out for them.
- The contributions that each organisation is required to make to finance PSBs should recognise wider commitments that they have to other partnerships (including to other PSBs). .....Page 42

**Recommendation 3.** The Future Generations Commissioner and Welsh public bodies should ensure that they develop constructive relationships. The inconsistency in their relationships has limited the impact of the Commissioner’s work..... Page 52

**Recommendation 4.** The Future Generations Commissioner should prioritise supporting public bodies and Public Services Boards to deliver this legislation. .... Page 53

**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government must continue with plans to set and publish milestones as required by section 10 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 no later than six months after the 2021 Senedd election. ....Page 76

**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government must continue with plans to review and publish revised national well-being indicators no later than six months after the 2021 Senedd election. The review should recognise the challenges and opportunities presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and take into account the views of public bodies, the public, and key stakeholders of the private and voluntary sectors. ....Page 76

**Recommendation 7.** The Welsh Government must carry out a review of the public bodies that are subject to the Act. The findings of that review should be implemented in sufficient time for any newly added public bodies to receive their funding allocations and associated remit letters for the 2022-23 financial year. The review should:

- take into account the impact on the implementation of the Act at a national level that including/omitting any particular public body would have;
- acknowledge that the inclusion of any additional public bodies will result in additional reporting, monitoring and auditing requirements that will inevitably have financial/resourcing implications;
- clearly set out the expectations of public bodies that are not formally subject to the Act in relation to sustainable development, and how those expectations will be monitored and enforced; and
- clearly set out the criteria against which inclusion/exclusion decisions were made and the process or timeframes by which future reviews will be initiated. ....Page 77

**Recommendation 8.** The Welsh Government must continue with plans to frame remit letters around the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, following consultation with the Future Generations Commissioner. The new

remit letters should be in use no later than in relation to the 2022-23 financial year. ....Page 78

**Recommendation 9.** The Welsh Government must not create any new partnership or collaborative structures to fulfil any functions unless it has fully explored whether:

- existing partnership structures could undertake those functions instead;
- the new structure could replace existing ones;
- the functions can be carried out by existing public bodies; and
- after consultation with public bodies affected by the proposed changes, can demonstrate support for the new structures from a majority of public bodies affected by them. ....Page 80

**Recommendation 10.** The Welsh Government must publish guidance no later than six months after the next Senedd election that sets out:

- how the work of Regional Partnership Boards, Public Services Boards, Corporate Joint Committees, alongside other major partnership structures, interact with each other within the framework of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with examples of good practice;<sup>80</sup>
- what flexibility partnerships have to make decisions to better and more efficiently organise themselves;<sup>80</sup>
- where partnerships and organisations can take action to simplify or consolidate the governance and reporting structures to reduce repetition and duplication; and<sup>81</sup>
- the Welsh Government's view of the landscape of partnership structures over the next reporting period (2020-25), including any proposals to abolish or consolidate those structures. ....Page 81

**Recommendation 11.** Public bodies subject to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 must ensure that the five ways of working are

embedded in their plans for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. We recommend that any gains they have made in their immediate response to the pandemic are not lost, and that they shift their focus from the day-to-day to long-term and prevention. ....Page 86

**Recommendation 12.** As we enter the second reporting period, the Auditor General for Wales must raise his expectations of public bodies and not hesitate to highlight poor adoption of the sustainable development principle. ....Page 91

**Recommendation 13.** The Business Committee of the Sixth Senedd should ensure that the Senedd's Committee structure facilitates effective scrutiny of legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other matters that cross policy areas and Ministerial portfolios. ....Page 97

**Recommendation 14.** The Business Committee of the Sixth Senedd should give specific consideration to how post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 should be undertaken, and refer that body of work to an appropriate Committee or forum accordingly.....Page 97

## 1. Introduction

In May 2020, for the first time, the Future Generations Commissioner and the Auditor General for Wales published statutory reports summarising their work and findings under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. As we began planning our inquiry, we could not have anticipated the extent to which it would be shaped by the wider social and political context.

### What does the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 do?

#### The sustainable development principle

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1. When the Well-being of Future Generations Bill was introduced in July 2014, the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty summarised in his statement to Plenary that:

“[...] the Bill puts sustainable development at the heart of public service government in Wales [...] it enshrines in legislation our shared commitment during fifteen years of devolution to make sustainability central to everything that we and the wider public sector do.”<sup>1</sup>

2. It does this by placing a duty on 44 public bodies, including the Welsh Government (‘the Welsh Ministers’), to act in a way that seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is called the ‘sustainable development principle’.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Senedd Cymru, ‘[Record of Proceedings: Plenary, 08/07/14](#)’, page 37, viewed on 15 February 2021

<sup>2</sup> Legislation.gov.uk, ‘[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Section 5](#)’, viewed on 27 January 2021



## The well-being goals

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3. The Act creates seven well-being goals which together set out an aspirational vision for the future of Wales.<sup>3</sup>
4. The Act goes on to place a duty on public bodies to maximise their contribution to the well-being goals by setting 'well-being objectives' for their own organisations and meeting those objectives.

## Collaborative, advisory and enforcement structures

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5. The Act establishes a 'Future Generations Commissioner for Wales', whose role is to promote the sustainable development principle and monitor and assess the extent to which public bodies have met their well-being objectives.
6. To facilitate collaboration between public bodies, the Act creates Public Services Boards. There are currently 19 Public Services Boards across Wales, bringing together local public bodies to improve the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of their areas.
7. The Auditor General for Wales is assigned the task of examining public bodies to make sure that they are acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle when they set their well-being objectives and in the steps they take to meet those objectives.
8. The Act creates a series of reporting and monitoring duties on various bodies to support the Senedd and others to hold the government and public bodies to account. For example, the Welsh Government must publish 'national indicators' and 'milestones' to measure progress, and the 44 public bodies subject to the Act and Public Service Boards must report on progress against their own well-being objectives.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Legislation.gov.uk, '[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Section 4](#)', viewed on 28 January 2021

<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government, '[National wellbeing indicators](#)', December 2020, viewed on 25 February 2021

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**9.** The Future Generations Commissioner must publish a Future Generations report, and the Auditor General for Wales must publish a report on his examination of public bodies under the Act. Both reports must be published once every reporting period (usually every five years).

### What is this inquiry about?

**10.** This inquiry focuses on the barriers to implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act') and how it can be implemented successfully in future.

**11.** We have taken a broad and holistic view of the implementation of the Act to identify themes that are relevant across public services in Wales. Although we have asked public bodies about their own work as part of our evidence gathering, we have not commented on how well individual organisations have implemented the legislation. This is an important line of inquiry, but one that falls within the remit of the Auditor General for Wales and the Future Generations Commissioner rather than this Committee.

**12.** We have also tried to avoid debate over the rights and wrongs of what the Welsh Government was trying to achieve with the Act, and whether the Act as drafted is the right way to achieve it. These are also valuable areas for scrutiny, but, again, they are outside the remit of this inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

### Why is the inquiry important?

**13.** The Act is an ambitious piece of legislation - the first of its kind in the world. It has an impact on the entirety of the Welsh public service and beyond. It is important to ensure that the Act is being implemented as it should; it fundamentally changes the way that decisions about public services are made and, ultimately, how they are delivered. It is also important to explore and better understand the barriers to the successful implementation of the Act and how these could be overcome.

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<sup>5</sup> However, we do consider how the Senedd might approach scrutiny of this legislation – including the policy intent and how the Act was drafted – in chapter 7.

**14.** This is the first time that the Senedd has taken a comprehensive look at the work that has been carried out under the Act by the various bodies responsible for implementing it. Valuable scrutiny of the legislation itself and the work of the Future Generations Commissioner has been undertaken since the Bill was first introduced (notably by the Environment and Sustainability Committee of the Fourth Assembly<sup>6</sup> and the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee of the Fifth Assembly<sup>7</sup>). However, the effectiveness of the implementation of the Act has not been subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

**15.** We also believe that this Act is particularly relevant in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Recovery from the crisis provides an opportunity for policy makers to assess how public services can be reshaped for the better. If it is to be implemented successfully, this Act must be front and centre of that process.

### Why now?

**16.** Our work on this Act was initially planned to coincide with the publication in May 2020 of the Future Generations Commissioner's report 'The Future Generations Report 2020'<sup>8</sup> and the Auditor General for Wales' report 'So, what's different?'<sup>9</sup> By law, the reports must be published no later than one year before each general election to the Senedd. These reports were the first of their kind to be published since the passing of the Act in 2015.

**17.** These reports give the Senedd invaluable levers for scrutiny of how the Act has been implemented. Together, they summarise the progress that public bodies have made and what the Welsh Government and others should do in future to implement the Act more successfully.

**18.** In spring 2020, Chairs from committees across the Senedd discussed how scrutiny of the Act and the two reports would be taken forward. They agreed that the Public Accounts Committee would lead the inquiry, inviting other Senedd

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<sup>6</sup> Senedd Cymru. '[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)', viewed on 13 January 2021

<sup>7</sup> Senedd Cymru, '[Scrutiny of the Future Generations Commissioner](#)', viewed on 13 January 2021

<sup>8</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. '[The Future Generations Report 2020](#)', May 2020, viewed on 12 January 2021

<sup>9</sup> Audit Wales. '[So, what's different?](#)', May 2020, viewed on 22 February 2021

committee Chairs to contribute to the inquiry by attending Committee meetings.

**19.** However, in May 2020 public bodies were grappling with the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. We decided to delay our inquiry to autumn 2020. The second and third waves of the pandemic took hold in Wales once the rescheduled inquiry was underway. It became clear that if we wanted to continue our work, we would have to do so in the context of Covid-19.

**20.** The evidence we gathered in autumn 2020 told us that public bodies and other stakeholders have an important story to tell about this Act. Despite the enormous pressures they were working under, they wanted to share that story with us. We were struck with their buy-in to this ambitious legislation, and their desire to make it work for the people of Wales. If anything, this ambition seemed stronger given the potential for innovation as we recover from Covid-19. We therefore took the decision to proceed with our inquiry in spring 2021.

### How did we carry out the inquiry?

**21.** We gathered evidence from a range of different people and organisations across the public, voluntary, and private sectors. We chose to focus our evidence gathering around six headline themes:

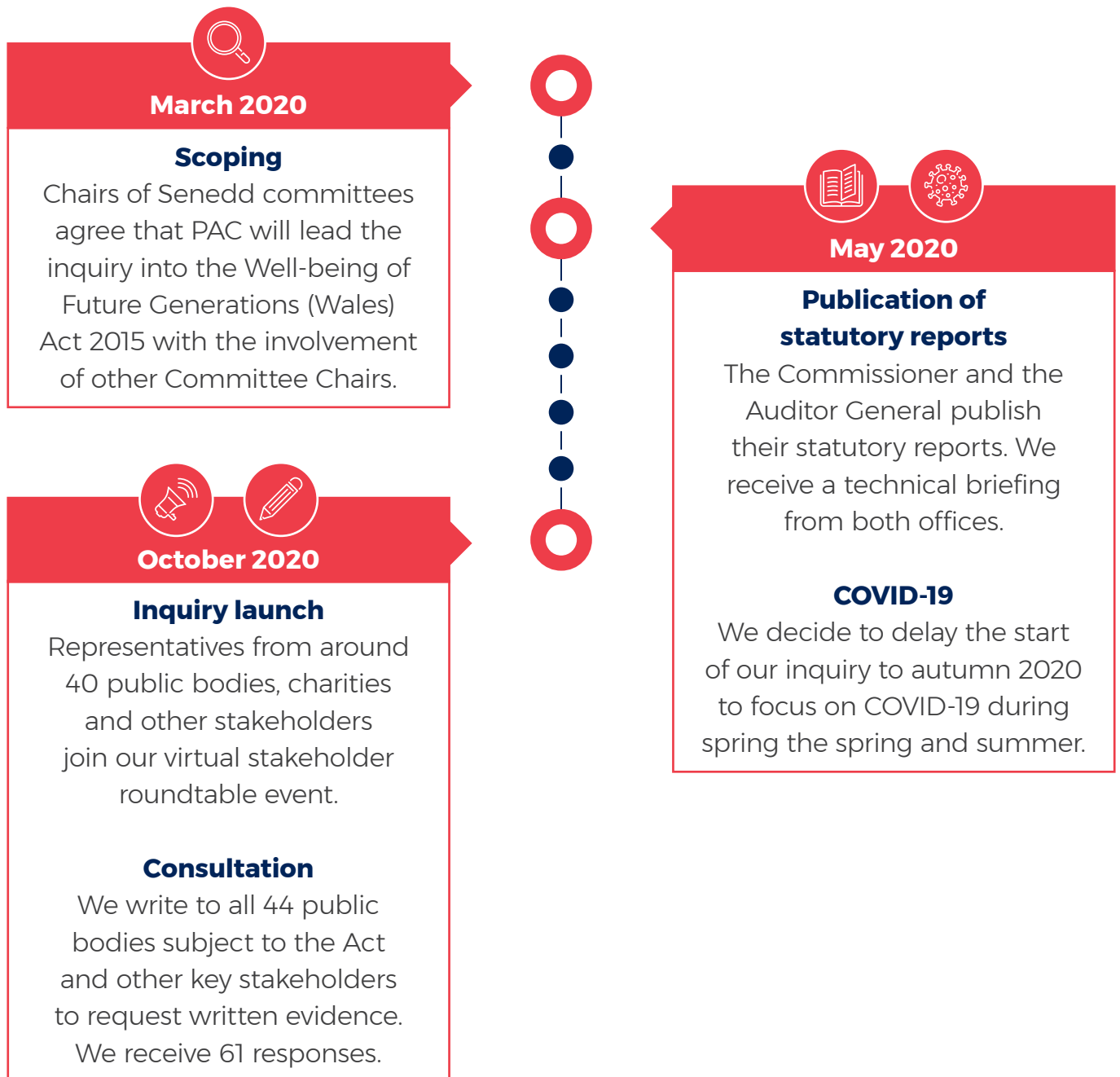
- 1.** Awareness and understanding of the Act
- 2.** The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act, and how effectively those resources have been used
- 3.** The support provided by the Future Generations Commissioner
- 4.** The leadership role of the Welsh Government
- 5.** Other potential barriers (e.g., Brexit, Covid-19, etc.)
- 6.** How to ensure the Act is implemented successfully in the future

**22.** As we reviewed and discussed the evidence collected, it became clear that the final theme - how to ensure the Act is implemented successfully in the future - naturally leads on from consideration of the barriers.

**23.** We have therefore structured this report around the first five themes, incorporating views about the both the first five years of this Act and the future into each chapter. In the final chapter of this report, we briefly reflect on the role of the Senedd itself in relation to this legislation.

# Inquiry timeline:

The timeline below sets out how we conducted our inquiry.







**November 2020**

**Engaging young people**

We write to over 70 educational establishments to ask for young people's views on what the Act means for them. We receive two responses, representing the views of 14 people.



**January 2021**

**Targeted survey**

We publish a short questionnaire for Welsh public service employees to complete to help us understand the extent to which public bodies are engaging with their staff about the Act.



**March 2021**

**Our report**

We publish our final report. A debate on the report is held in the Senedd Siambr.



**December 2020**

**Evidence sessions**

We start gathering oral evidence from stakeholders and public bodies via formal Committee meetings.



**February 2021**

**Scrutiny**

We hold our final scrutiny session with the Future Generations Commissioner and the Welsh Government.

## 2. Awareness and understanding

In this section we explore whether public bodies know what they should be aiming for and whether that knowledge permeates across all staff. We consider how much other stakeholders need to know about the Act, even if they are not subject to it themselves. Finally, we explore what level of awareness and understanding is needed from the public to implement the Act successfully.

### Defining what 'good' looks like

**24.** Concerns were raised when the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill was first introduced about whether the proposed legislation had the clarity it needed to drive change on the ground.<sup>10</sup> We asked public bodies whether it was clear to them what good implementation of the Act looked like in practice.

**25.** Overall, they did. An Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) official said:

“[...] at an executive or strategic level, there is a clear sense of what 'good' looks like [...] that then gets translated across the organisation into the divisions”

**26.** She added “some of our divisions are more mature in terms of understanding that vision than others”.<sup>11</sup> This was a consistent theme: the senior

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<sup>10</sup> See Christine Chapman AM's contribution on 8 July 2014, for example (National Assembly for Wales, ['Record of Proceedings: Plenary, 08/07/2014'](#), page 46, viewed on 3 February 2021), or Llyr Gruffydd AM's contribution to the Stage 4 debate on 17 March 2015 (National Assembly for Wales, ['Record of Proceedings: Plenary, 17/03/2015'](#), page 51, viewed on 3 February 2021)

<sup>11</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ['Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21'](#), paragraph 32

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levels of public bodies seem to have a good grasp of what they need do to, even if defining it in tangible terms was trickier.<sup>12</sup>

**27.** The Wales Centre for Public Policy suggested that some members of Public Services Boards:

“[...] found the concepts and language within the Act confusing, aspirational and vague and most believed that the space within the Act for local interpretation was a challenge and often caused confusion. This was especially true of central concepts such as sustainable development and well-being [...]”<sup>13</sup>

**28.** We put these concerns to the Permanent Secretary of the Welsh Government. She acknowledged that “the reports from both the Commissioner and the Auditor General for Wales show that there are still quite different approaches across the public sector in Wales”.<sup>14</sup> She explained:

“One of the ways that we’ve tried to approach this issue is by working very closely with the Commissioner and also the third sector to agree on a definition of ‘prevention’ to help understand the application of that way of working”.

**29.** However, she went on to argue that the legislation itself is “very clear cut in the obligations and commitments that it makes”.<sup>15</sup>

## Culture change: awareness and understanding across public bodies

**30.** We heard that senior leadership teams knowing what ‘good’ looks like is not enough if their staff at all levels of public bodies do not share that understanding. This is about organisational culture, an issue that came up time and time again as a major barrier to effective implementation of the legislation.

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<sup>12</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings. 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 195

<sup>13</sup> Wales Centre for Public Policy, ‘[Submission to the Public Accounts Committee’s Enquiry on the Barriers to Implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)’, January 2021, viewed on 12 February 2021

<sup>14</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings. 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 150

<sup>15</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings. 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 150

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**31.** Sustrans Cymru told us:

“[...] public bodies really need to think about culture change at all levels as well, so that the existing staff are really thinking about how the future generations Act impacts their everyday working activities, and it’s ingrained within the way everyone works, rather than necessarily thinking that it’s vested in some individual who is the officer that looks after that.”<sup>16</sup>

**32.** Others agreed, suggesting the point of the legislation is to “think strategically about what does Wales need to look like in 10, 15 or 20 years [...] it’s the point about changing culture.”<sup>17</sup> For many of our witnesses, achieving culture change was one of the principal barriers to implementation of the Act. We were often told that this barrier would take a long time to overcome.<sup>18</sup>

**33.** Most witnesses acknowledged that awareness and understanding of the Act across all staff was crucial if the public services they deliver are to reflect the principles of sustainable development. Sport Wales emphasised that every person in a public body is as important as the Chief Executive in terms of delivering on the intention of the Act. However, it acknowledged that this area of work could be developed and improved within the organisation.<sup>19</sup>

**34.** Some public bodies had introduced processes to improve understanding, such as building the Act into impact assessments for new policies or initiatives.<sup>20</sup> Others told us that Audit Wales’ fieldwork focusing on the five ways of working had been useful in reinforcing the Act across public sector staffing.<sup>21</sup>

**35.** The evidence we received pointed to considerable discrepancies in how, and to what extent, staff across the public sector had been engaged about the Act, and the extent to which it was shaping their work.

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<sup>16</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 179

<sup>17</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 71

<sup>18</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 20

<sup>19</sup> Written evidence, [FGA53 Sport Wales](#)

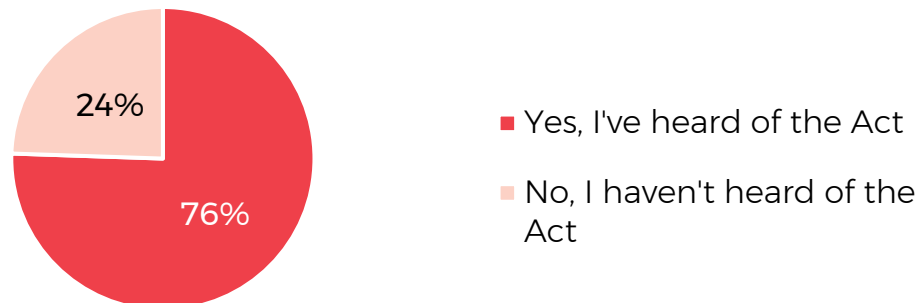
<sup>20</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 26

<sup>21</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 186

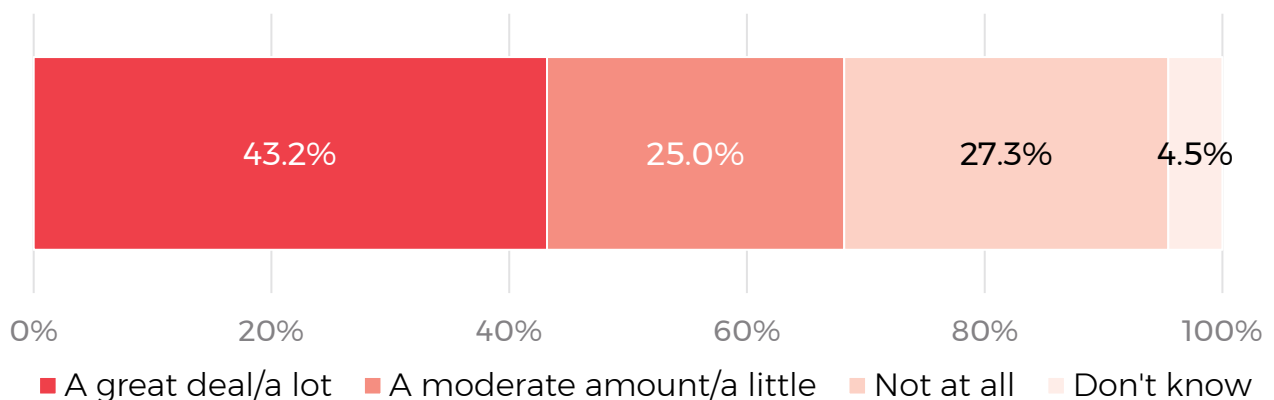
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**36.** We launched a short online poll to give an indication of how well understood the Act is amongst staff of the 44 public bodies subject to the Act.

**Figure 1.** We asked employees of the public bodies subject to the Act to respond to the following question: “Have you heard of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?” 94 individuals responded.



**Figure 2.** We asked employees of the public bodies subject to the Act to respond to the following question: “To what extent has your employer engaged with you about the Well-being of Future Generations Act and what it means for your work?” 88 individuals responded.



**37.** The results indicate a relatively good level of awareness of the Act overall (76% of 94 respondents had heard of it), but a mixed picture of how well public bodies are actively engaging with staff about how the Act affects their work. 43.2% of 88 respondents indicated that their employers had engaged with them “a great deal” or “a lot”. 27.3% indicated that their employers had not engaged with them at all.

## Charities and the private sector

**38.** We heard that the voluntary and private sectors fulfil key roles both in supporting others to provide public services and providing services themselves.

We were struck by the strength of feeling and level of engagement of the third and private sector organisations that contributed to our inquiry.<sup>22</sup>

**39.** The Head of Policy and Advocacy at WWF Cymru explained to us how she saw the role of the third sector in implementing the Act in:

“[...] highlighting not just our role in public engagement but also as expert advisers on the implementation of the Act, on what sustainability means, on what radical transformation, system change, can look like— both the policies and the design and the evaluation of that is a critical role for the third sector”.<sup>23</sup>

**40.** However, unlike public bodies, third and private sector organisations that deliver or support public services are not subject to the Act. There is no statutory requirement for them to adopt the principles of the legislation, even in their dealings with Welsh public bodies that are subject to that duty. For some public bodies, getting the third and private sector on board has been challenging. We heard this is improving, and that “working with the private and voluntary sectors [...] can bring that vision for an integrated, collaborative, resilient, prosperous Wales to life”.<sup>24</sup>

## The public

**41.** We asked stakeholders and witnesses to what extent the public are aware of the Act and what it means for public services in Wales. We reasoned that this legislation more than any other should trigger a national conversation about how public services should be delivered. This conversation is dependent on the public bodies themselves engaging with their service users, alongside more general promotional work from other key players: the Welsh Government, the Commissioner and the Auditor General for Wales (Auditor General).

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<sup>22</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 7

<sup>23</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 151

<sup>24</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 338

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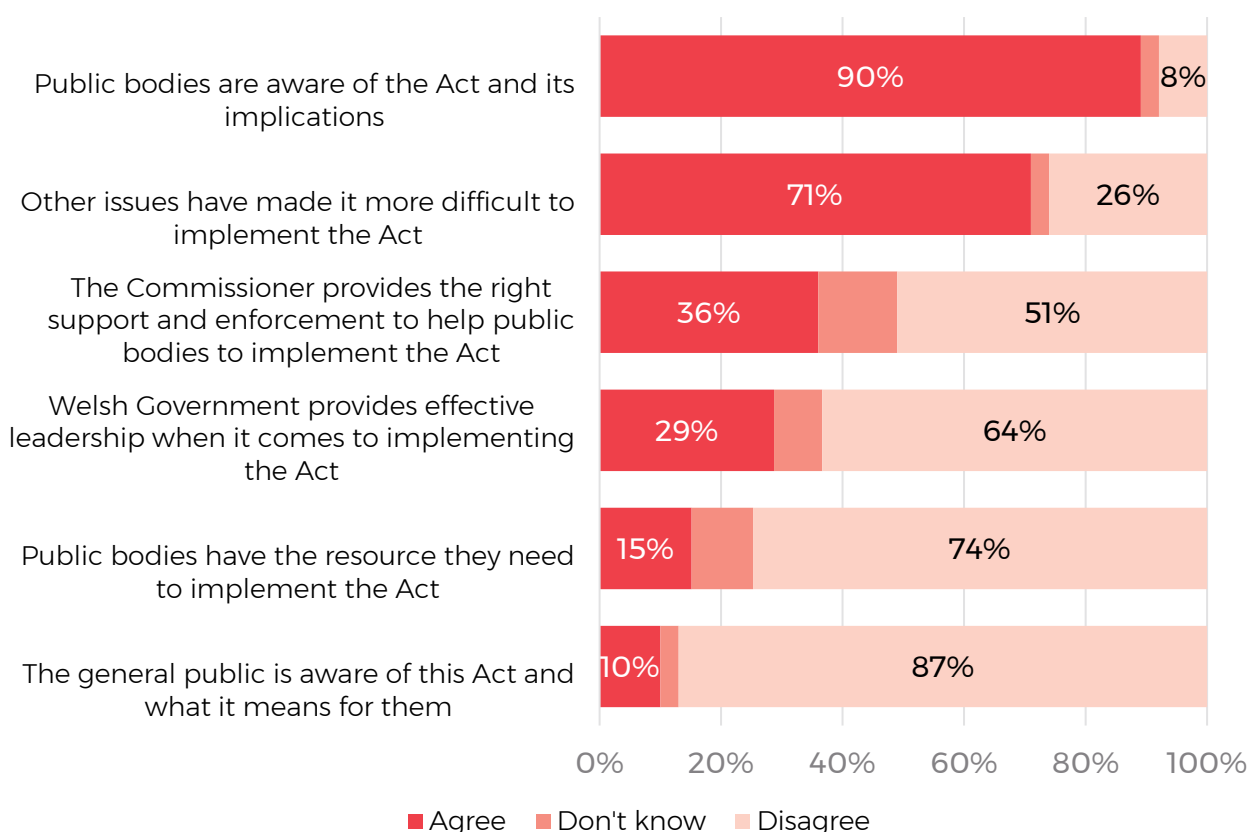


**42.** We were frequently told that public awareness of the Act is low. Where people have heard of it, they usually see it as quite detached from their everyday lives. A WWF Cymru representative told us:

“[...] there have been no real surveys to get a sense through an evidence base, really, to anticipate how much public awareness there is, but I think, anecdotally, if you ask any of your family or friends what the well-being Act is, I think everyone would find a blank look on faces.”<sup>25</sup>

**43.** The results from our poll of those who attended our stakeholder event on 12 October 2020 pointed to low levels of awareness amongst the public (as well as high levels of awareness across public bodies themselves).

**Figure 3. We used virtual polls to ask attendees at our stakeholder event whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:**



**44.** We also asked the young people who took part in our engagement activities whether they had heard of the Act and the Future Generations

<sup>25</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20', paragraph 149

Commissioner. Only 2 of the 14 students had. It is important to note that not only are the students likely to be a particularly well-informed and engaged group of the public, they represent an age group that should be primary beneficiaries of this legislation.<sup>26</sup>

**45.** We were not surprised to hear that public awareness of this legislation is probably low. The legislative process can be complicated, and carrying out effective and far-reaching engagement with the public is a significant challenge for any government or legislature. We were keen to establish whether this Act is particularly difficult to understand, compared to other legislation.

**46.** We heard that it was:

“[...] the multifaceted nature of the Act brings added complexity and therefore makes it difficult to convey a single clear message about the purpose of the Act and what it means for individuals, communities, organisations and their staff.”<sup>27</sup>

**47.** Even so, the public having a poor understanding of legislation is not necessarily a barrier to it being implemented successfully. We challenged our witnesses on whether it was necessary for the public to know about the Act.

**48.** The Auditor General told us that it was a “strategic barrier to implementation”. He said that the debate about policy making must be positioned “at a national level in the context of the Act, time and time again [...] this is about changing the natural of the political debate”.<sup>28</sup>

**49.** A Velindre University NHS Trust official agreed:

“The more informed we are as a nation, the better the discussion and the more challenging it is. So, I think that’s really, really important. I think the other thing, in realistic terms, as part of Wales, change happens in groups of five to eight, it doesn’t happen by didactic, top-

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<sup>26</sup> Written evidence: [Delivering for future generations: the story so far. Summary of engagement with young people](#)

<sup>27</sup> Written evidence. [FCA4.0 Hywel Dda University Health Board](#)

<sup>28</sup> Public Accounts Committee, [‘Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20’](#), paragraph 55

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down policy. That's where we get real change: what does it mean for me in my locality, in my community, and how can it make a little bit of a difference?"<sup>29</sup>

**50.** Many witnesses did not feel that the public needed to know "the finer points of legislation".<sup>30</sup> There was consensus, however, that the public should be aware of the shift in public service delivery towards the principles enshrined in the Act.<sup>31</sup>

**51.** We therefore assumed that public bodies would be taking steps to communicate that shift to their service users. When we put that to our witnesses, we were disappointed to hear many witnesses acknowledge that they need to do more.

## Our view

**52.** We appreciate that raising awareness and understanding and changing culture takes time. However, the Act was passed over five years ago. Public bodies have had enough opportunity to take this vital first step towards embedding sustainable development in public services.

**53.** Whilst the public does not need to know about the intricacies of the Act, the public **does** need to understand that there has been a fundamental shift towards sustainable development in the governance and delivery of public services in Wales. Without this understanding we do not see how the public can join the conversation about how public services can be run more sustainably, or hold those in charge of public services to account for how they are implementing the Act. Despite pockets of good practice emerging, not all public bodies are distilling the intricacies of the Act and into a clear and relevant message that can be communicated to the people of Wales.

**54.** If public bodies' service users are not aware of the Act's core principles, this suggests to us that implementation of the Act to date has been from the top-down; it is happening to people, not with people. We agree with the Auditor

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<sup>29</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21', paragraph 39

<sup>30</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20', Paragraph 154

<sup>31</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20', Paragraph 55

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General: a lack of public awareness is a sign that the national debate has not shifted. If the national debate has not shifted, the legislation is not working as it should.

**Conclusion 1.** Public bodies have not done enough to build awareness and understanding amongst their service users of the shift to sustainable development across public services.

**55.** We have reached similar conclusions about culture change within public bodies themselves. We have no doubt that senior leadership teams of public bodies across Wales have a good understanding of the legislation. However, this understanding does not spread throughout all public bodies' staff. Organisations cannot claim to have affected culture change if most of their staff have no awareness that a programme of culture change is even underway. We conclude that this, too, is a barrier to the implementation of the Act.

**Conclusion 2.** Public bodies have not done enough to change the culture of their own organisations to align with the principles of the Act. Consequently, the culture change that is essential to the successful implementation of this Act has not taken place.

**56.** We were reassured by the expertise, engagement, and commitment of the representatives of the third and private sectors that contributed to this inquiry.

**57.** We did not take sufficient evidence from charities and private companies to know whether the awareness and understanding of the organisations that contributed to our inquiry is representative of the sectors as a whole. We suspect for some it is, and others have more to do. However, given that those bodies are not subject to the Act, we consider it is ultimately the responsibility of the public bodies that work alongside them to ensure that their work aligns with the principles of the Act.

**58.** We also recognise the value of the third sector and academia in providing expertise, advice, and support. The public sector could be making more use of this resource.

**Conclusion 3.** Public bodies are yet to take full advantage of the expertise and capacity within the third and private sectors to support their work under the

Act. Therefore, public bodies could realise additional benefits of working alongside third and private sector organisations to adopt the principles of the Act when they deliver services for and on behalf of the public service.

### 3. Resources

It would be difficult to investigate how public bodies are implementing any legislation without touching on resourcing issues. We asked whether it was reasonable to expect more funding in the current context, and whether, even if funds were available, public bodies need more resources to implement the Act, or whether they need to use existing resources differently.

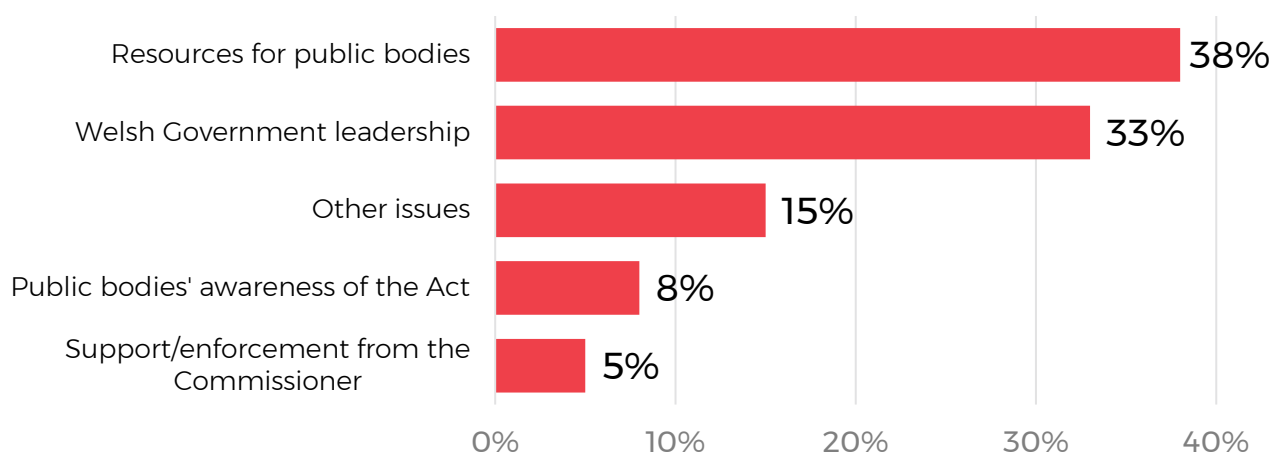
#### Whether public bodies have the resources they need

**59.** The purpose of this inquiry was to identify public sector-wide barriers to implementation of this Act. We focused on issues common to the 44 public bodies subject to the Act, rather than scrutinising individual public bodies and their leadership. We wanted to find out whether public bodies as a whole have the resources they need to implement the Act successfully (an issue relevant to all public bodies), rather than how successfully each body's leadership had used them (an issue that varies considerably from one public body to another).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> The responsibility for scrutinising the work of individual public bodies falls primarily to the Future Generations Commissioner, as set out in part 3 of the Act, and to the Auditor General for Wales, under section 15. See: Legislation.gov.uk, '[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)', viewed on 2 March 2021.

**Figure 4. We used a virtual poll to ask those present at our stakeholder event “Which of the following is most significant when it comes to implementing the Act?” Resources for public bodies came out top.**



**60.** The Act itself does not place a duty on public bodies to carry out any additional functions. It encourages them to think differently about the public services that they already deliver and the ways in which they work.

**61.** However, the Act does place reporting requirements on public bodies. They must set and publish well-being objectives that are designed to maximise their contribution to the national well-being goals. Each public body must also publish a statement alongside its objectives to provide more detail about why it has set those specific objectives, the steps it will take to achieve them, how it will involve others in doing so, and other relevant information. Finally, after the financial year end, each public body must report on the progress it has made against its objectives.

**62.** We do not underestimate the work that public bodies need to do to develop their objectives. We were also unclear whether public bodies have expertise in-house to support this body of work. When we put these questions to the public bodies themselves, many responses – particularly those of local authorities – echoed the sentiment of Flintshire County Council:

“The Act encourages public bodies to behave in an “ideal world” – with multi year sustainable budget settlements, capacity for research and application, lack of bureaucracy and perfect partnership

arrangements. This is not reality and it takes effort to either develop and/or campaign/lobby for these ideals.”<sup>33</sup>

**63.** We heard that the demands placed on public bodies by the Act should be viewed in the context of austerity measures across the public sector. Many bodies do not have the capacity they used to have. Many argued, they “need resources to change culture”.<sup>34</sup>

**64.** Some public bodies have traditionally depended on physical assets – such as buildings – to provide public services. We heard that adopting the principles of the Act may involve one-off capital funding injections to modernise infrastructure.<sup>35</sup> However, in other areas, adopting the Act may actually have the opposite affect – challenging assumptions about how funding should be used. The Chief Executive and Librarian of the National Library gave us an example:

“I have come to the decision that we won’t build a new splendid building worth £3 million in Aberystwyth, but instead we’re going to invest that funding in public engagement, namely taking this archive out to the people [...] we need to look again at everything that we deliver in the context of COVID and the current economic climate and ask ourselves very critically whether we can do this differently, whether we can do it better, and whether we can do it so that it brings more benefit to the people of Wales.”<sup>36</sup>

**65.** Others suggested that the resourcing challenge was more nuanced. An Audit Wales official told us:

“[...] there’s a danger [...] that with resources comes grant dependency and, at some point, public bodies have to take the brave step of funding themselves and stepping back from one model of provision and moving on with another within their existing resources.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Written evidence, [FGA50 Flintshire County Council](#)

<sup>34</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 100

<sup>35</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 13

<sup>36</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 66

<sup>37</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 101

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**66.** An Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ANUHB) official suggested that one way to overcome resourcing issues was to “think about our responsibilities that we have collectively as a public sector organisation that really we can only achieve through collaboration with our other partners.”<sup>38</sup> A representative of Velindre University NHS Trust agreed, adding:

“[...] it’s that micro approach to pooling and collaboration that could be one of the tools we use, given that I don’t think we have the ability to influence the macro environment around funding allocation from UK level”.<sup>39</sup>

**67.** Some witnesses agreed there were considerable resource constraints, but, as the Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales told us, “moaning about funding is not going to help anybody. We’re in a really difficult situation and we have to make the best of what we’ve got.”<sup>40</sup>

## Funding allocation and budget cycles

**68.** The evidence we gathered at the stakeholder event in October 2020 and our consultation pointed towards a disconnect between how funding is awarded to public bodies and the principles of the Act. We asked our witnesses whether the process by which funding is awarded is a barrier to implementation.

**69.** The Auditor General for Wales (Auditor General) highlighted:

- the “short-term nature of some funding flows, which hamper [public bodies’] ability to plan effectively for the longer term”;
- “a lack of flexibility in how some parts of grant funding can be spent”; and
- the fact that “public bodies are only made aware of the availability of funding very late in the day, or late in the financial year”.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings.11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 77

<sup>39</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings.11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 84

<sup>40</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings.25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 225

<sup>41</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings.14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 7

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**70.** The majority of witnesses noted at least one of these points as a key barrier for their organisation.

### Funding cycles and flexibility

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**71.** A significant proportion of the funding that public bodies receive from the Welsh Government is determined and awarded annually.<sup>42</sup> The Welsh Government may set out broad areas for how this funding should be used by the public bodies or indicate strategic priorities for the organisation. Even so, public bodies generally have more flexibility over how they use this funding than other project-specific income streams or grants. We heard that this flexibility is essential.<sup>43</sup>

**72.** However, even with some degree of flexibility, annual funding allocations can be a barrier to long-term thinking and planning. A Flintshire County Council official said:

“[...] annual budgets do not help with long-term planning, do they? You’re always on that annual cycle, and although there’s relative stability, year to year, we are extremely hampered by short-term grant regimes that come out at the very last minute. We’ve almost got to have a whole portfolio of projects, potentially waiting to go, in case some money comes up with which we can undertake those.”<sup>44</sup>

**73.** Debate over the length of funding cycles at all levels of public services in Wales is well-rehearsed. We are also aware that the Welsh Government is actively lobbying the UK Government for longer-term financial settlements.<sup>45</sup> We asked witnesses whether, in that context, anything more could be done to provide public bodies with longer-term financial security. A Velindre University

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<sup>42</sup> Although NHS bodies are required to prepare and have approved by Ministers Integrated Medium Term Plans for 3 years, NHS funding is allocated annually by Welsh Government

<sup>43</sup> Gethin Morgan from Isle of Anglesey County Council explores the importance of adapting how resources are used to fit with local communities, See: Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 65

<sup>44</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 188

<sup>45</sup> Welsh Government, ‘[Draft Budget 2021-22](#)’, pages 1 to 4, viewed on 5 February 2021

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NHS Trust official set out the challenges for both the Welsh Government and public bodies:

“[...] it’s very difficult I think for organisations or the Welsh Government to operate in a different time cycle. And what people find when they put down longer term plans, which they need to do, is often they are made redundant by the fact that the funding cycle, or a crisis nationally through economic issues, renders those plans maybe unimplementable.”<sup>46</sup>

**74.** Other respondents disagreed that short-term funding cycles were a barrier to implementation. The Future Generations Commissioner acknowledged that short-term funding may make adopting the five ways of working “more challenging”, but argued that public bodies “should accept that a large proportion of the budget is static and does not change year on year.” This should be enough for them to ‘[set] out a vision through their well-being objectives’ and ‘work towards meeting their objectives.’<sup>47</sup>

#### Other sources of funding

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**75.** As well as their main sources of revenue funding, some public bodies also receive grant funding for specific projects or purposes. This funding can originate from the Welsh Government or other grant awarding bodies, such as the National Lottery.

**76.** We heard that these sources of income can be invaluable to start new projects, or programmes of work. This has led to some innovation and progress towards integration of the Act. However, it also presents some challenges:

“[...] whilst we’ve got the initial funding, to look at something innovative and creative that will make a difference to people locally, what we then have to do is look at our revenue budgets longer term and how that will then change to support and sustain the implementation of that innovation [...] there’s a significant amount of

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<sup>46</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 83

<sup>47</sup> Written evidence, [FCA33 Future Generations Commissioner](#).

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public money being invested in the creative element with uncertainty about the longer term sustainability”.<sup>48</sup>

**77.** The Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales explained that organisations with several different funding streams can mitigate this problem, at least to some extent. For example, income from commercial activities can be diverted to support other projects. However, public bodies that depend almost entirely on funding from the Welsh Government may not be able to benefit from this approach.<sup>49</sup>

### The resources available to Public Services Boards (PSBs)

**78.** Unlike other strategic partnership bodies, such as Regional Partnership Boards and the recently proposed Corporate Joint Committees, PSBs do not receive dedicated funding. Local authorities have a duty under the Act to provide PSBs with administrative support. PSBs also receive some income via the Welsh Government’s Regional Grant. However, “it is for each board to determine appropriate and proportionate resourcing of their collective functions.”<sup>50</sup>

**79.** The Welsh Government states in its 2016 statutory guidance for PSBs:

“[...] it is for the Board to determine how it will resource the functions it has to undertake, which are a responsibility of all the statutory members equally [...] [Members and participants] are not required to provide financial assistance but may do so if they consider it is within their powers”.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 199

<sup>49</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 225

<sup>50</sup> Auditor General for Wales, ‘[Review of Public Services Boards](#)’, 2019, page 23, viewed on 23 February 2021

<sup>51</sup> Welsh Government, ‘[Shared Purpose: Shared Future](#)’, 2016, page 10, viewed on 5 February 2021

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## How do Public Services Boards carry out their work?

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**80.** The lack of dedicated funding for PSBs was regularly cited as a major barrier to their work.<sup>52</sup> We heard that the failure to formally allocate resources to PSBs prevented them from working effectively.<sup>53</sup> As a consequence of the funding model, the burden of resourcing PSBs can fall disproportionately on local authorities.<sup>54</sup> Some public bodies that engage with more than one PSB (Natural Resources Wales, for example, which is a statutory member of every PSB in Wales) need to make considerable resource commitments to the PSBs.

**81.** Pembrokeshire PSB set out some of the challenges it faces:

“Other than the regional PSB support grant (which unfortunately was not made available to PSBs this year), all resources deployed which enable the PSB to function effectively as a Board, and to deliver on its objectives, rely on each constituent partner being prepared to commit people, time and energy to make PSB working a success. This is a particularly difficult challenge at a time of diminishing budgets [...]”<sup>55</sup>

**82.** These challenges were echoed in oral evidence. The Auditor General highlighted the findings of his 2019 Review of PSBs, which concluded that the lack of dedicated funding is a barrier to their development.<sup>56</sup> The Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales agreed, setting out the practical realities of the situation:

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<sup>52</sup> See: Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraphs 112 and 115; Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 163; Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 199; Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 101; written evidence: [FGA2 Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority](#); written evidence: [FGA35 Ceredigion Public Services Board](#)

<sup>53</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 241; Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 240; written evidence: [FGA01 Powys County Council](#)

<sup>54</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraphs 274 to 175

<sup>55</sup> Written evidence, [FGA28 Pembrokeshire Public Services Boards](#)

<sup>56</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 115

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“[...] one of the problems is that you have a number of different bodies around the PSB table and you are always asking one of them to take a lead. And that can result in good partnership working, it can also sometimes create difficulties and tensions and barriers.”<sup>57</sup>

**83.** The Chief Executive of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, and Chair of the Pembrokeshire PSB, explained the challenges his Board has faced when considering an informal pooled budget arrangement:

“We’ve had discussions as a PSB whether we should all contribute £5,000 in order to build a fund for some work as a PSB. I think the problem we have is the fact that for our organisation and the county council we contribute once. If you go to the health board, they have to contribute three times to three different PSBs. If you go to the fire and rescue service, then it’s up to six, and, if go to Natural Resources Wales, it’s obviously 22. So, there are barriers there [...]”<sup>58</sup>

**84.** Despite this, we were reassured that many PSBs were managing to navigate the challenges posed by their funding model to provide real benefits to their communities. Some PSBs have merged, creating regional structures to work efficiently across local communities. Others reach across their geographical boundaries to embed collaborative working.

**85.** The Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales told us that the work of the PSBs presents “a genuine opportunity and forum in which we can work with partners to deliver a whole range of good things for people and communities in Wales.”<sup>59</sup> The Chief Executive of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority agreed, noting the important role that PSBs can play in the recovery from the pandemic:

“In the context of COVID, I think we came to the conclusion that the resilience forums are taking the short term, but long-term recovery was going to be led by the PSBs. When we look around the table, I

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<sup>57</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 229

<sup>58</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 240

<sup>59</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 310

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don't think there is another partnership that has as diverse a representation at senior level of the public services. Therefore, if we truly aspire for a unified, one public service driving change across Wales, then probably you don't need to invent something else, because the PSBs exist.”<sup>60</sup>

## Our view

### Funding for public bodies

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**86.** We agree with those who reminded us that the purpose of this Act is not to place additional burdens on public bodies. The purpose of the Act is to make them think and behave differently. This point is clearly stated by Cytûn:

“[...] it is important to convey to public bodies that the "five ways of working" mandated by the Act are an alternative way of working – not additional ways of working to the usual way. Long term, preventative, integrated, collaborative and inclusive policy making and implementation should over time be able to save money and resources, rather than having to ask for more.”<sup>61</sup>

**87.** However, we also agree with the Auditor General and others that embedding culture change requires resource and expertise. We appreciate that, after a sustained period of real-terms funding cuts across the public sector, public bodies may feel that resourcing day-to-day challenges is difficult enough without diverting resources away from the front lines to research and embed aspirational legislation such as this Act.

**88.** In the short term, they require the support of others: the Welsh Government, the Future Generations Commissioner, and the Auditor General. We discuss the role of these bodies later in this report. Looking into the future, however, public bodies must not use funding as an excuse for failing to adopt the principles of sustainable development.

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<sup>60</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 344

<sup>61</sup> Written evidence: [FCA15 Cytûn - Churches Together in Wales](#)

**Conclusion 4.** A lack of additional funding for public bodies to embed the principles of sustainable development and the five ways of working should not be a barrier to implementation of the Act.

**89.** We are more sympathetic with the calls from public bodies for longer funding cycles. Legislation which requires public bodies to plan for future generations is more difficult to implement properly if budgets are guaranteed for as little as one year at a time.

**90.** We agree with the Future Generations Commissioner: public bodies' budgets are largely static. But the difference of a few percent in a public body's budget can make the difference between one project or another, or between one approach to public service delivery or another. These fluctuations are especially challenging for public bodies if they are informed about their budget allocations shortly before the next financial year.

**91.** For similar reasons, we agree that late notice of grant funding opportunities is not helpful either. Collaboration takes time, as do conversations around resourcing collaborative work.

**92.** The UK Government does not consistently provide the Welsh Government with long-term (i.e. more than 1 year at a time) funding settlements. Since funding from the UK Government makes up most of the Welsh Government's funding, we recognise that it is challenging for the Welsh Government to pass down long-term funding settlements to Welsh public bodies. However, we urge the Welsh Government to do what it can to provide longer-term financial security to the public bodies that are subject to this Act to give them every opportunity to implement it successfully.

**Conclusion 5.** Short funding cycles and late funding announcements have made it more difficult for public bodies to collaborative effectively, plan for the future, and make the most out of the resources they have.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 1.** The Welsh Government should carry out of a review of how it can provide longer-term financial security to the public bodies that are



subject to this Act. This review should be completed in time to inform funding decisions in relation to the 2023-24 financial year.

### Funding for Public Services Boards (PSBs)

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**93.** It is clear to us that the work of PSBs is constrained by their funding model. The public bodies that sit on the Boards must go through unnecessarily complicated, time-consuming, and resource-intensive processes, as well as sometimes difficult discussions amongst members, to ensure that they have adequate resources to do their work.

**Conclusion 6.** The inconsistent funding arrangements for Public Services Boards limit their effectiveness. Requiring each Board to separately overcome the same fundamental resourcing challenge is inefficient, has no clear justification and has led to undesirable inconsistencies in what Boards do and how they work.

**94.** PSBs have taken different approaches to harness the resources of their members and take advantage of funding opportunities. While we welcome the pragmatism of the PSBs and fully agree that they should have the flexibility to respond to the needs of their communities (by merging with neighbouring boards, for example), we do not understand why they are not subject to clear and consistent funding arrangements. This is even more surprising when:

- many public bodies are members of more than one PSB, putting pressure on their ability to contribute to each one and meaning that they contribute to different PSBs in different ways;
- by and large, the members of PSBs are the same across the country, with the same statutory responsibilities, and with the same principles underpinning their funding. There does not seem to be any rational explanation for why there should not be a common approach to pooling their resources; and
- public bodies have been facing years of real-terms funding cuts. It is naïve to believe that they are likely to donate their resources voluntarily and enthusiastically to PSBs.

**95.** We agree with the Auditor General, the Future Generations Commissioner, and most of the public bodies that contributed to this inquiry: to fulfil their vital role, PSBs must have access to funding. This is the approach the Welsh Government has taken with Regional Partnership Boards, and the approach that it now appears minded to take with Corporate Joint Committees.<sup>62</sup> We see no clear rationale for treating PSBs any differently.

**96.** We urge the Welsh Government to commit to reviewing how PSBs are funded with a view to clarifying and simplifying their resourcing arrangements. We believe this will ensure that PSBs can focus on supporting public bodies to drive the implementation of this legislation.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 2.** The Welsh Government should carry out a review of how the work of Public Service Boards is funded. The review should begin no later than six months after the next Senedd election, with its conclusions implemented in time for them to inform funding allocations for the 2023-24 financial year. The review should be undertaken with the following principles in mind:

- PSBs should be able to access pooled funds, drawn from the resources of their statutory members, which they could either hold as formal corporate entities, or via informal arrangements.
- PSB budgets should be determined by clear, consistent guidelines set out by the Welsh Government.
- PSB budgets should be informed by the role that the Welsh Government has set out for them.
- The contributions that each organisation is required to make to finance PSBs should recognise wider commitments that they have to other partnerships (including to other PSBs).

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<sup>62</sup> Welsh Government, '[Consultation Document: Regulations to establish Corporate Joint Committees \(CJCs\)](#)', October 2020, pages 19 to 21, viewed on 16 February 2021

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## 4. The Future Generations Commissioner

As both ambassador and enforcer, the Future Generations Commissioner's role is to ensure that sustainable development is front and centre of public services, to advise government, and to monitor and assess public bodies' progress towards their well-being objectives. In this chapter, we discuss the Future Generations Commissioner's resources, how her office has prioritised work, and how public bodies have responded.

### The Future Generations Commissioner's role

**97.** The role of the Future Generations Commissioner (the Commissioner) is to promote the sustainable development principle, and monitor and assess the extent to which public bodies are meeting their well-being objectives.<sup>63</sup> She does this by providing guidance, advice and assistance to public bodies – including the Welsh Government - and to the Auditor General for Wales (Auditor General), and by carrying out research. In practice, the kind of things the Commissioner does include:

- giving advice to encourage public bodies on how to apply the Act;
- producing resources to support public bodies' decision making and planning;
- providing written advice on specific issues; and
- providing support and training.

**98.** The Commissioner also has the power to undertake reviews of whether individual public bodies are safeguarding the ability of future generations to

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<sup>63</sup> Legislation.gov.uk, '[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Part 3](#)', viewed on 9 February 2021

meet their needs. As part of the review, the Commissioner can make recommendations to the public body. The public body must take reasonable steps to follow any course of action proposed by the Commissioner in her recommendations.

## How the Commissioner has approached her work

**99.** The Commissioner has a broad duty under the Act with significant scope to shape and prioritise her work. We asked her what work her office had prioritised since 2015, and why. The Commissioner explained that she began by recognising her office's work should be focused where it would have the most impact:

“I have posed to myself the same question or challenge that public bodies are given: what are the things that, if we got them right, if we did them well, would make the biggest contribution to meeting the seven well-being goals?”<sup>64</sup>

**100.** At the beginning of her tenure, the Commissioner carried out a six-month “involvement and engagement exercise across Wales with a range of different organisations”. The outcome was that her office decided to focus on six areas: skills; health and wellness system; adverse childhood experiences; land use planning and placemaking; housing; and transport.<sup>65</sup> The Commissioner explained that many critical areas of sustainable development, such as decarbonisation and the Welsh Government's budget, are cross cutting and touch on a number of those six priority areas.<sup>66</sup>

**101.** The Commissioner's office also responds to requests for support from public bodies, including the Welsh Government. She told us that she has received 663 requests for advice from public bodies in the last two and a half years.<sup>67</sup> Her office responds to these requests with either generic advice, using pre-prepared materials and resources, or tailored advice where queries “are aligned with my

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<sup>64</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 56

<sup>65</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, ‘[Priority Areas](#)’, viewed on 9 February 2021

<sup>66</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 56

<sup>67</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 57

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internal criteria [...] (depending on the capacity on my team). This can range from a single tailored email to a full joint working exercise [...].<sup>68</sup>

**102.** The Commissioner told us that she has invested a significant amount of her time into supporting, advising, and lobbying the Welsh Government; 43% of those 663 requests for her support have come from the Welsh Government.<sup>69</sup>

**103.** We asked the Commissioner specifically about how she had been prioritising her work during the pandemic:

“[...] my support to date has focused on the Welsh Government, and the reason for that is that if we get it right from the top, then we have a better chance of that trickling down. There’s also an element of resources and capacity of my office, in terms of our ability to support the other 43 public bodies in an intensive way.”<sup>70</sup>

**104.** She added that she is currently in the process of developing a detailed work plan that will focus more closely on working with public bodies to support them in implementing the Welsh Government’s priorities for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>71</sup>

## Public bodies’ views about the Commissioner’s support

**105.** The feedback we received from public bodies themselves, and from wider stakeholders, was that the Commissioner’s public profile is positive, and that she and her office are excellent at promoting and raising awareness of the Act. Sport Wales said “the Future Generations Commissioner [has] been a champion for the Act and has raised its profile; not being frightened to stand up for it. Her public profile has raised awareness of the Act and its potential.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, ‘[Advice and Assistance](#)’, viewed on 9 February 2021

<sup>69</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraphs 22 and 56 to 57

<sup>70</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 22

<sup>71</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 22

<sup>72</sup> Written evidence: [FCA53 Sport Wales](#)

**106.** Some public bodies noted the high level of knowledge and understanding of sustainable development within the Commissioner's office. An Aneurin Bevan University Health Board official told us:

"We've found that the support and the input that we've had to date from the future generations commissioner's office has been very, very helpful [...] we were fortunate to have one of the officers come and deliver a session for us with respect to longer term decision making. Colleagues within the health board found that expertise and that input very useful indeed, and they were able to see how that applied to their day-to-day work."<sup>73</sup>

**107.** Other public bodies were also positive about the support and resources the Commissioner provides. Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board stated:

"The FGC Office publishes very accessible resources, using innovative ways of engaging people and organisations, often thought-provoking and challenging traditional ways of communicating."<sup>74</sup>

**108.** However, not all public bodies agreed. Some said that they had not received enough practical support from the Commissioner's office. For some, communication and correspondence is "limited", and attendance at Public Services Boards (PSB) meetings is "fairly sporadic".<sup>75</sup> Others, such as the NHS Confederation, were unsure about what level of support public bodies could expect:

"[...] the extent to which the role of the Commissioner's office is to adopt a 'hands on' approach to supporting NHS Wales organisations in implementing the Act is not always clear. NHS Wales organisations would welcome more practical support opportunities from the Commissioner's office [...]"<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21', paragraph 124

<sup>74</sup> Written evidence: [FCA19 Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board](#)

<sup>75</sup> Written evidence: [FCA02 Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority](#)

<sup>76</sup> Written evidence: [FCA25 Welsh NHS Confederation](#)

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**109.** South Wales Fire and Rescue Service felt that the Commissioner’s office had a “limited understanding [...] of how public sector organisations work along with the constraints we are expected to work within.”<sup>77</sup> Denbighshire County Council agreed, suggesting the Commissioner’s recommendations were often not discussed with public bodies before being published, and “betray limited understanding of the geographic, financial and strategic considerations of our organisation.”<sup>78</sup>

**110.** We also heard about the length of the reports and the volume of resources that the Commissioner’s office produced. The reports were described by some as “unmanageable”,<sup>79</sup> “inaccessible to ordinary people”<sup>80</sup> and “difficult to penetrate”<sup>81</sup>. The Chief Executive of Powys County Council explained how that can make it challenging for resource-stripped public bodies to take on board the Commissioner’s findings:

“[...] when the reports arrive, the first reaction is, ‘Great, but how are we going to deal with this?’ There is so much in there, and often they come with very little advance notice [...] For a lot of us, when they arrive, you think, ‘Oh, okay, this is a really chunky document that we’ve now got to digest..’”<sup>82</sup>

**111.** Public bodies had some suggestions about how the Commissioner’s work could be refocused to support them most effectively. Some public bodies suggested to us that the Commissioner should prioritise promoting the Act to the Welsh Government and feeding into the Welsh Government’s policy development process. However, most wanted more direct support for public bodies. Some called for regional representatives to ensure that support was available to public bodies across the country.<sup>83</sup> Many called for link officers within

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<sup>77</sup> Written evidence: [FGA23: South Wales Fire and Rescue](#)

<sup>78</sup> Written evidence: [FGA44 Denbighshire County Council](#)

<sup>79</sup> Written evidence: [FGA01 Powys County Council](#)

<sup>80</sup> Written evidence: [FGA06: Oxfam Cymru](#)

<sup>81</sup> Written evidence: [FGA35 Ceredigion Public Services Board](#)

<sup>82</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 214

<sup>83</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 79

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the Commissioner's office to provide sector-specific advice to public bodies.<sup>84</sup> Others just wanted more of the Commissioner's time.<sup>85</sup>

**112.** When we put public bodies' proposals to the Commissioner, she was more than receptive:

"I'd absolutely love to be able to do that. I think that, looking at some of the evidence that you've heard from different organisations, it seems that quite a number of them have said that where we are able to go in and provide that support, it does have an impact, and quite a number of them have said, 'What we would like is more time from the commissioner's office,' and I couldn't agree more. My challenge is my level of resources."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21', paragraph 216

<sup>85</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21', paragraph 121

<sup>86</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21', paragraph 45

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“My current level of funding is insufficient to allow me to thoroughly monitor and assess all public-body well-being objectives and provide the level of support needed to change public sector culture.”<sup>88</sup>

**114.** The Commissioner compared her funding to that of other commissioners and organisations:

“I am the lowest funded commissioner with the biggest remit. Just to give you a kind of flavour in terms of my resources, I get £1.509 million; £71,000 less than the children’s commissioner, £1.648 million less than the Welsh Language Commissioner. Again, to give you some comparisons, my budget, £1.509 million, the Welsh Books Council, £3.649 million, and the Welsh Local Government Association, £3.2 million [...]”<sup>89</sup>

**115.** The Commissioner’s view was borne out by what we heard during our stakeholder event, the evidence we received from our written consultation, and during verbal evidence sessions. Overwhelmingly, we were told by public bodies that the Commissioner’s office did not have the resources to be able to provide public bodies with the levels of support they wanted.

**116.** The Head of Built Environment at Sustrans Cymru was clear in his view that the Commissioner’s resourcing constraints meant that her office could not get involved at a local level, which impacted on her ability to effect change within the transport sector.<sup>90</sup>

**117.** One Velindre University NHS Trust official felt that the Commissioner could do more to engage with the public and encourage secondments between public sector bodies and the Future Generations Office, which would improve working relationships.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Written evidence: [FGA33 Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#)

<sup>89</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings..01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 45

<sup>90</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings..14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 257

<sup>91</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings..11/01/21](#)’, paragraphs 117 and 140

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**118.** Many public bodies suggested that they would benefit from dedicated regional or sectoral specialists within the Future Generations Office, but recognised that this, too, was not possible given the Commissioners budget.<sup>92</sup>

## Our view

### The work of the Future Generations Commissioner to date

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**119.** We were reassured that, overall, the Commissioner's public profile is positive. She promotes the Act well, and she and her team have good expertise.

**Conclusion 7.** The Commissioner and her office have developed a positive public profile and have effectively promoted and raised awareness of the Act. They have considerable expertise in sustainable development, which underpins the support and advice they provide to public bodies and the Welsh Government.

**120.** However, we were struck by the range of views about the work of the Commissioner and her office expressed by public bodies. We heard many specific examples of when the Commissioner's office's expertise and guidance had shaped public services for the better or had helped to embed the culture change that is so central to the successful implementation of this legislation.

**121.** We also heard that some public bodies do not have a positive relationship with the Commissioner's office and they feel inadequately supported. They do not think that the Commissioner is using the resources she has in the right way, and it is not always clear that her office is sensitive to the day-to-day challenges that many public bodies face.

**122.** We understand that the Commissioner's role means that, inevitably, she and her colleagues will at times have challenging and even critical conversations with public bodies. This is appropriate and necessary. Nevertheless, successful implementation of this Act depends on collaboration, which in turns depends on strong and constructive relationships. We therefore urge the Commissioner and

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<sup>92</sup> For example, see contributions from Annwen Morgan, Isle of Anglesey County Council, and from Alun Williams, Ceredigion County Council. Public Accounts Committee, '[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)', paragraphs 79 and 82.

public bodies to reflect on they can do to build trust and improve their working relationships.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 3.** The Future Generations Commissioner and Welsh public bodies should ensure that they develop constructive relationships. The inconsistency in their relationships has limited the impact of the Commissioner's work.

### The Commissioner's budget

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**123.** It is not appropriate for this Committee to make recommendations about the precise levels of funding that the Commissioner should receive. Funding allocations are a policy matter for the Welsh Government, and therefore outside the remit of this Committee.

**124.** We note that the length of some reports published by the Commissioner's office makes it more difficult for some public bodies to engage with their findings. We urge the Commissioner to consider making her reports shorter and more focused, which hopefully will free up capacity within her office for other activities.

**125.** Nevertheless, we also note the consistent evidence we received about the Commissioner's budget from stakeholders. Public bodies overwhelmingly agreed that the Commissioner had particularly limited resources, whatever their views on how those resources had been deployed.

**126.** We conclude that the Commissioner's budget has prevented her and her office from supporting public bodies as much as they would like to be supported.

**Conclusion 8.** The Future Generations Commissioner's budget has not given her office sufficient capacity to provide public bodies with the levels of practical and sector-specific support that they have called for to implement the Act.

### Looking to the future: prioritising resources

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**127.** It is unfortunate that so much of the Future Generations Commissioner's time is spent supporting the Welsh Government. We acknowledge that the

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Welsh Government will benefit from the Commissioner's expertise, and are encouraged by their ongoing collaboration. However, public bodies from different sectors and different regions have told us that they need more support from the Commissioner to implement this legislation.

**128.** We have made it clear that public bodies should not receive any additional funding to implement the Act. However, we agree with the Auditor General: "to get from A to B will require some specific resourcing".<sup>93</sup> This specific resourcing does not need to be more money. But it does need to be expertise in driving culture change across their organisations.

**129.** We believe the Commissioner should be prioritising her resources directly to the public bodies responsible for translating the legislation into changes to how public services are delivered. Whether her office appoints regional representatives or specialist link officers to do that is a matter for the Commissioner and the public bodies she supports.

**130.** It is the responsibility of the Welsh Government itself – not of the Future Generations Commissioner – to ensure that the Welsh Government has sufficient expertise in-house to ensure that its policy and decision making aligns with the principles of the Act. The Welsh Government should not need to be lobbied to implement its own legislation.

**131.** And it is the responsibility of the Senedd – not of the Future Generations Commissioner – to hold the Welsh Government to account if its policy or legislation is inconsistent with this legislation.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 4.** The Future Generations Commissioner should prioritise supporting public bodies and Public Services Boards to deliver this legislation.

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<sup>93</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20', paragraph 99

## 5. The Welsh Government

The Act itself includes the Welsh Government (“the Welsh Ministers”) in the list of public bodies that are subject to the legislation. The Welsh Government therefore shares the same fundamental sustainable development responsibilities as the other 43 public bodies subject to the Act. In addition, the Welsh Government has other specific leadership responsibilities, such as publishing national indicators and milestones, and promoting sustainable development. Here, we discuss how the Welsh Government has fulfilled its dual role.

### Leading by example: the Government as a public body

**132.** Just like Health Boards, local authorities and other public bodies subject to the Act, the Welsh Government must set and work towards well-being objectives that contribute to the national well-being goals. The Welsh Government must set and publish its well-being objectives after each Welsh general election, which will usually mean that they are in place for five years. The Welsh Government published its 12 well-being objectives for 2016-21 in 2017,<sup>94</sup> and reports on its progress against those objectives are published annually – most recently in 2020.<sup>95</sup>

**133.** We recognise that setting well-being objectives and making decisions in pursuit of those objectives are policy matters and are ultimately the responsibility of the Ministers themselves rather than the civil service. Of course, civil servants give advice to Ministers and help them shape and define policy; we discuss this later in this chapter. Even putting that aside, the Welsh Government

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<sup>94</sup> Welsh Government, ‘[Well-being statement 2017](#)’, page 14, viewed on 10 February 2021

<sup>95</sup> Welsh Government, ‘[Annual Report 2020](#)’, viewed on 10 February 2021

is a public body just like the other 43 that fall under this Act, and a particularly important one.

**134.** We agree with the Future Generations Commissioner: not only will public bodies take their lead from the Welsh Government’s example, but they will inevitably be affected by how successfully the principles of the Act have been embedded across the Government.<sup>96</sup> Or, as the students who engaged with our inquiry told us: “It’s the fault of the governing party if ultimately things aren’t right”.<sup>97</sup>

**135.** We asked the Permanent Secretary of the Welsh Government whether she believed the Act had been adopted across the organisation:

“It’s been encouraging that our recent people survey— a survey of all our staff across a very wide range of subjects— shows that there is high awareness and pretty high levels of adoption of the five ways of working and understanding of what they involve. There’s obviously some variation across the organisation, and we’ll be looking to follow that up now and make sure that everybody has the same understanding and awareness of what the Act means for them [...]”<sup>98</sup>

**136.** However, we heard from many public bodies and stakeholders that there was a siloed approach to working in Welsh Government, a lack of consistency in how the Act is applied and slow culture change within the organisation. This was particularly apparent during the first years after the Act was passed. WWF Cymru pointed us towards its 2017 investigation, which concluded that “there is no systematic, coherent approach by WG to implementing the [Act].”<sup>99</sup>

**137.** The Auditor General for Wales (Auditor General) told us that although Audit Wales’ examination of the Welsh Government was “very positive” (see Chapter 6 for more information about how the Auditor General for Wales has approached

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<sup>96</sup> Written evidence: [FCA33 Future Generations Commissioner](#).

<sup>97</sup> Written evidence: [Delivering for future generations: the story so far. Summary of engagement with young people](#)

<sup>98</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings..01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 155

<sup>99</sup> Written evidence: [FCA58 WWF Wales](#)

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his work), “repeatedly [...] we’re seeing decisions taken by the Welsh Government that are not entirely congruent with the spirit of the Act.”<sup>100</sup>

**138.** We challenged the Permanent Secretary on whether there was still considerable variation in how well Welsh Government departments have adopted the Act. She said:

“[...] this is an overarching framework, it’s not a straitjacket [...] There needs to be individual decision making involved. I don’t want to take a check-list approach to how we respond to the Act in all of our documents, but what we’re talking about here is a culture change, and that takes some time to embed. The Act came into force five years ago. I think there’s been huge progress over that period. I personally see enormous commitment and pride across the whole of the organisation in an Act that is uniquely Welsh, and that, I think, is very powerful.”<sup>101</sup>

**139.** We heard that Welsh Government’s response to the pandemic had “accelerated a natural development of our approach to the five ways of working”.<sup>102</sup> The Permanent Secretary explained that she has created a new directorate on “restart and recovery”, which she positioned within the team responsible for Well-being of Future Generations policy.<sup>103</sup> A Welsh Government official pointed towards the 21-day review of Covid-19 regulations as an example of where the Welsh Government had embedded the five ways of working by engaging across the Government, local authorities, Health Boards and community groups.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 85

<sup>101</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 157

<sup>102</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 148

<sup>103</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 147

<sup>104</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraphs 168 to 170

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## Promoting the Act

### Awareness raising

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**140.** The Act places a duty on the Welsh Government to promote sustainable development.<sup>105</sup> For some, this involves promoting awareness of the Act with the public. The Chief Executive of Isle of Anglesey County Council argued that “the Welsh Government has a specific role in promoting the Act and accelerating the emphasis and importance of the Act”.<sup>106</sup>

**141.** Similarly the Director of Strategic Transformation, Planning, Performance and Estates at Velindre University NHS Trust suggested that a “big education awareness-raising, marketing campaign about getting people sighted on the Act at a local level would be beneficial.”<sup>107</sup>

**142.** We heard similar views from attendees at our stakeholder event, who pointed towards positive work of this kind being done by governments pursuing sustainable development agendas in other countries. We asked the Permanent Secretary what the Welsh Government had done to engage with the public about the Act:

“We have, in the Welsh Government, put a lot of effort into public awareness. We are accountable, after all, and therefore, in the early phases of implementation, resources were provided, including lots of animations, the famous booklet, and all the other things that we put out to generate public awareness and understanding of something so fundamentally important to how we are developing policy for the future”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Legislation.gov.uk, ‘[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Section 16](#)’, viewed on 18 February 2021

<sup>106</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 92

<sup>107</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 194

<sup>108</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 183

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**143.** The Permanent Secretary suggested that “general knowledge and understanding of the Act will increase as people see tangible outcomes and a difference of approach”. For example, she explained the public in Wales:

“[...] will recognise the difference [...] between the approach that was taken in England to developing their system for tracing and protecting people and the one here, which was genuinely co-created with local stakeholders and customers; the same with the shielding initiative. Both of those took a little bit longer to develop as a result, but, once co-created, they had buy-in from all of those stakeholders and customers involved”.<sup>109</sup>

### The “implementation gap”

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**144.** The Future Generations Commissioner believes there is “an implementation gap between the aspiration set out by Welsh Government in policy and legislation and its commitment to drive and resource delivery on the ground.”<sup>110</sup> We asked public bodies and stakeholders whether they agreed.

**145.** The Head of Policy and Advocacy at WWF Cymru explained that the third sector organisations that had been working on sustainable development had “high expectations of the impact of the Act” and though they “thought that would happen rather quickly”, that was not the case.<sup>111</sup>

**146.** The Commissioner agreed, adding that “we got off to quite a slow start at the beginning of the Act coming into force. We weren’t really seeing that very clear political leadership around the Act, and therefore it wasn’t really flowing down into the civil service and so on.”<sup>112</sup>

**147.** That sentiment was generally shared by representatives of many public bodies. Although the Act regularly featured in the Government’s headline messaging and policy intent, concerns were raised about whether that

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<sup>109</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 184

<sup>110</sup> Written evidence, [FCA33 Future Generations Commissioner](#)

<sup>111</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 226

<sup>112</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 27

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translated to implementation. An Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) official told us:

“Sometimes, there’s a sense that the relationships are shown at the start of a policy, and they’re mapped out in the introduction in the policy section, but then, when it comes to the follow-through on that and the implementation and the monitoring, the positioning of the Act becomes weaker.”<sup>113</sup>

**148.** We asked the Permanent Secretary whether she felt there was an implementation gap:

“[...] I do believe that there is a very strong pride in and commitment to the Act across the whole of the civil service, but inevitably there will be best practice in some areas that we need to turn into standard practice. So, that’s what we’re looking at— where is there best practice” [...]<sup>114</sup>

**149.** She went on to stress that “both the First Minister and his Cabinet are very clear about the requirements of the Act, and fully committed to making them a reality.”<sup>115</sup> The Act is a “framework for how we use all our existing resources” rather than an add-on or a sideshow.<sup>116</sup>

### Monitoring and assessing national progress

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**150.** The Welsh Government’s statutory role also includes monitoring and assessing national progress towards the well-being goals. Under section 10 of the Act, the Welsh Government must publish national indicators and milestones to measure national progress towards the well-being goals. There are no timescales in the legislation setting out when they must do so.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 150

<sup>114</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 219

<sup>115</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 201

<sup>116</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 233

<sup>117</sup> Legislation.gov.uk, ‘[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Section 10](#)’, viewed on 18 February 2021

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**151.** The Welsh Government can choose what form the indicators take, over what period they apply, and how often they should be revised. The purpose of the milestones is to break down the journey towards the national indicators to make it easier to measure progress towards them. The Welsh Government set 46 indicators in 2016,<sup>118</sup> but, despite publishing a consultation on the milestones in January 2019<sup>119</sup> and committing to a further update in autumn 2019,<sup>120</sup> none have been set.

**152.** We heard that this was typical of Welsh Government's "painfully slow" progress<sup>121</sup>, particularly during the early years.

**153.** Colegau Cymru believed the Welsh Government should review the current indicators in light of the pandemic:

"Considering the huge challenges the country has faced over the last eight months due to the pandemic, it would be timely to review the current indicators and assess whether they are still the most useful ones, and likewise, whether there is any scope for reduction and simplification."<sup>122</sup>

**154.** On 19 February 2021, not three weeks after the Permanent Secretary and her officials appeared before our Committee, Jane Hutt MS, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip set out in a written statement that:

- the pandemic should "lay the foundations for a sustainable future";
- the Welsh Government was "in a position to start work on the Future Trends Report, restart the important work on the development of

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<sup>118</sup> Welsh Government, 'Written Statement - How to measure a nation's progress? - The national well-being indicators for Wales', 17 March 2016, viewed on 16 February 2021

<sup>119</sup> Welsh Government, 'Measuring our nation's progress', January 2019, viewed on 16 February 2021

<sup>120</sup> Welsh Government, 'Written Statement: How do we assist Welsh Ministers in measuring a nation's progress? - Proposals for developing a set of national milestones for Wales', 17 July 2019, viewed on 16 February 2021

<sup>121</sup> Written evidence: [FCA06 Oxfam Cymru](#)

<sup>122</sup> Written evidence: [FCA21 Colegau Cymru](#)

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National Milestones for Wales and make some small changes to the National Indicators”;

- the Welsh Government had published a roadmap for 2021<sup>123</sup> “setting an accelerated timescale for delivery”; and
- a cross sector stakeholder advisory forum had been established to:  
“gather stakeholder perspectives on key issues, opportunities and barriers to the implementation of the WFG Act; share innovative practice; and, provide a mechanism for discussion between Government and stakeholders on key matters relating to further implementation of the WFG Act.”<sup>124</sup>

**155.** These commitments touch on many of the concerns raised by the those who contributed to our inquiry, which we put to the Permanent Secretary in Committee on 1 February 2021.<sup>125</sup> The timetable associated with the announcement anticipates that the milestones and the revised national indicators will be laid in the Senedd no later than December 2021.<sup>126</sup>

## How the Act feeds into policy development

**156.** Clearly, the Welsh Ministers themselves must embed sustainable development within their own portfolios if this Act is to be reflected all areas of Government policy. The Welsh Government Civil Service has a key role to play in advising Ministers on policy development. Therefore, we would expect the Act to be embedded in the Welsh Government Civil Service’s policy development process.

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<sup>123</sup> Welsh Government, ‘[Future Trends, National Indicators and National Milestones: Consolidated plan for 2021](#)’, 19 February 2021, viewed on 22 February 2021

<sup>124</sup> Welsh Government, ‘[Written Statement: Shaping Wales’ Future: Delivering National Well-being Milestones and National Well-being Indicators and a report on Wales’ future](#)’, 19 February 2021, viewed on 22 February 2021

<sup>125</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’

<sup>126</sup> Welsh Government, ‘[Future Trends, National Indicators and National Milestones: Consolidated plan for 2021](#)’, 19 February 2021, viewed on 22 February 2021

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**157.** Once again, we heard from many that this was not always the case, particularly during the years immediately after the Act was passed. WWF Cymru pointed us to their 2017 investigation, which concluded that the Welsh Government’s response to the Act found that “there is little evidence as yet that the [Act] frame is driving policy development”.<sup>127</sup>

**158.** The Chief Executive and Librarian of the National Library argued that this was still the case. He told us that “It’s difficult to see where the policy of the Government in relation to culture and a thriving Welsh language is aligned with the requirements of the Act at present.”<sup>128</sup> Coleg Gwent and Inspire Training students agreed, arguing that the education system is too target-driven, and fails to recognise the importance of creative skills and subjects that are crucial to achieving a culturally vibrant Wales.<sup>129</sup>

**159.** The Future Generations Commissioner put it particularly bluntly:

“[...] when you start getting different bits of guidance and policy coming from Welsh Government, which doesn’t link to the thing that they’ve created in statute over here and that takes us off in a different direction, that is where the whole thing starts to be undermined.”<sup>130</sup>

**160.** Not all public bodies agreed. The Chief Executive of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority told us that “the Act has a prominent place in policy and the work of the Government.”<sup>131</sup> Velindre University NHS Trust asserted that the Welsh Government has “really good legislation, good policy makers who are trying to do the right thing [...] I think Government, in fairness to them, are getting much better at it and I think we’re getting far clearer policy.”<sup>132</sup>

**161.** We asked the Permanent Secretary how the policy development process works in practice. She explained the Welsh Government has “built in systems

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<sup>127</sup> Written evidence: [FGA58 WWF Wales](#)

<sup>128</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 92

<sup>129</sup> Written evidence: [Delivering for future generations: the story so far. Summary of engagement with young people](#)

<sup>130</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 90

<sup>131</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 270

<sup>132</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 152

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and guidance structures to make it natural to apply the five ways of working and to consider the contribution that any given policy will make to the well-being goals.” Templates for advice for Ministers now include a section on how the advice will “help embed and implement the well-being of future generations Act, bringing it to the attention of policy advisers at crucial stages throughout the policy development process.”<sup>133</sup>

**162.** The Permanent Secretary assured us that “the First Minister and his Ministers are very strongly committed to the Act. They show real leadership. They are demanding of us in respect of the future generations context in developing policy.”<sup>134</sup>

**163.** We pushed the Permanent Secretary for an example of when officials have needed to challenge a Minister about a policy proposal being inconsistent with the Act. We were surprised that she could not think of one. On the contrary:

“[...] to be honest, it’s more the opposite that I can point to, where I can see that the way that policy has been developed has been very much accelerating the development of the five ways of working and delivering the Act.”<sup>135</sup>

**164.** The Permanent Secretary explained that the Welsh Ministers were “instinctively committed to the Act” and that “some really difficult policies have benefited from and been driven by the five ways of working.”<sup>136</sup>

**165.** Given the assurances we received from the Permanent Secretary about the commitment of the Welsh Ministers to the Act, we would expect to hear from public bodies and stakeholders that the policy landscape was overwhelmingly consistent with the Act’s principles. This was not the case.

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<sup>133</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 164

<sup>134</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 188

<sup>135</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 197

<sup>136</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 201

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## The complex landscape of legislation and partnership bodies

### A cluttered partnership landscape

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**166.** A common criticism of the governance of public services in Wales is there are too many partnership arrangements. In January 2014, a commission tasked with examining all aspects of governance and delivery in the devolved public sector in Wales stated that “collaboration between public-sector organisations has been the defining theme of Welsh public-sector management since devolution. In part this reflects a principled choice in favour of co-operation rather than competition in service provision.”<sup>137</sup> However, the report went on to state that “the ways in which partnership structures had developed and grown was burdensome and over-elaborate”.<sup>138</sup>

**167.** Since then, other legislation and policy has further complicated the partnership landscape. Some of the key partnerships include:

- The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 established Regional Partnership Boards.
- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 created Public Services Boards.
- Informal partnership boards have been created to make decisions relating to the funding from City and Growth Deals (which were confirmed between 2016-17).
- The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 will create Corporate Joint Committees.

**168.** Concerns about the complexity of the partnership landscape in Wales in relation to the Act were raised when the Well-being of Future Generations

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<sup>137</sup> Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, ‘[Summary Report](#)’, January 2014, page 21, viewed on 22 February 2021

<sup>138</sup> Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery, ‘[Summary Report](#)’, January 2014, page 22, viewed on 22 February 2021

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(Wales) Bill was being scrutinised by the Assembly in 2014.<sup>139</sup> These concerns persist.

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<sup>139</sup> National Assembly for Wales Environment and Sustainability Committee '[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Bill Stage 1 Committee Report](#)', November 2014, page 13, viewed on 10 February 2021

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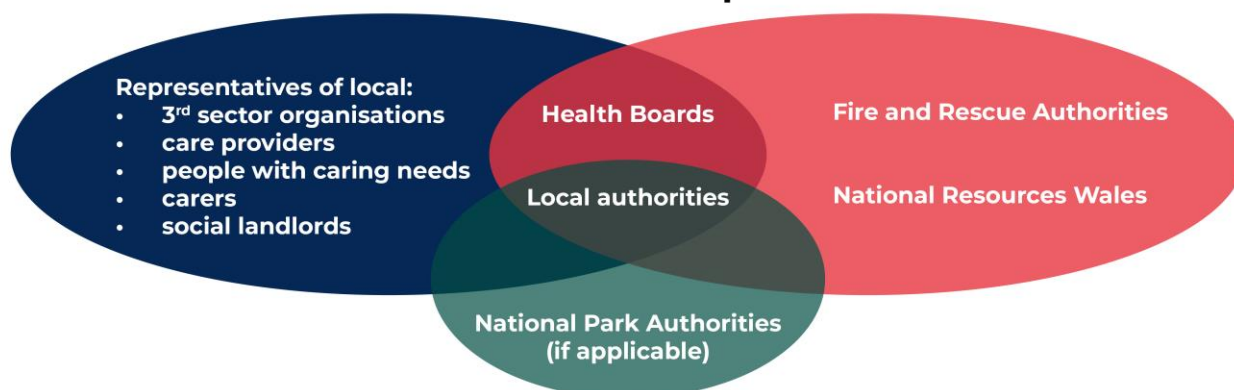
An overview of the membership, remit and core duties, and funding of Regional Partnership Boards, Public Services Boards and Corporate Joint Committees.

## Partnership working in Welsh public services



\*Based on current Government proposals. Details to be confirmed in regulations.

## Membership



## Remit and core duties



## Funding



**169.** The Welsh Government, the Welsh Local Government Association, and the NHS Confederation carried out a joint review into strategic partnerships in Welsh public services. Their report, published in July 2020 (and which did **not** consider the additional impact of Corporate Joint Committees), highlighted concerns over an excessive number of partnerships and meetings; differences of opinion over the overlapping functions of some boards; and lack of alignment of the partnerships' footprints. The review did not conclude that any specific partnership body should be abolished. However, it recommended the following:

- No new partnerships should be established without considering whether an existing partnership can deliver the required outcome.
- No new functions should be given to existing partnerships without considering what obligations can be reviewed or removed or what additional resources may be required.
- The Welsh Government should provide more guidance to Chairs and clarify what flexibilities are able to review their own arrangements.<sup>140</sup>

**170.** In her 2020 report, the Future Generations Commissioner recommended that the Welsh Government should stop “complicating an already complex landscape”.<sup>141</sup> The Auditor General’s 2020 report raised similar concerns, both about the complexity of the partnership landscape and inconsistencies in how they are funded and resourced.<sup>142</sup>

**171.** During this inquiry, we heard more concerns raised from public bodies and stakeholders about the complexity of the partnership landscape in Wales than any other issue. The Auditor General for Wales (Auditor General) summed up the position:

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<sup>140</sup> Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association and the NHS confederation, ‘[Review of Strategic Partnerships](#)’, July 2020, viewed on 10 February 2021

<sup>141</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. ‘[The Future Generations Report 2020](#)’, May 2020, page 125, viewed on 12 January 2021.

<sup>142</sup> Auditor General for Wales, ‘[So, what’s different?](#)’, pages 8 and 38 to 39, May 2020, viewed on 10 February 2021

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“I think that the diagnosis of the issue that we have is clear. We’ve had numerous reviews and examinations of the partnership landscape, and, fundamentally, they all say the same thing— that it’s too complicated.”<sup>143</sup>

**172.** We were told of confusion about how partnerships interact and make decisions; inconsistent budget and resourcing arrangements; different and competing priorities across partnerships and member organisations; overlapping – but misaligned – geographical footprints; to name just a few issues. As the Future Generations Commissioner explained:

“The complex landscape is a huge, huge problem. So, we keep layering new boards and bodies, which makes it difficult for implementation on the ground. We haven’t yet completely nailed our performance management approach, so we’re still managing performance or analysing performance on the basis of short-term performance measures.”<sup>144</sup>

**173.** Given that concerns about the complexity of the partnership landscape in Wales in relation to the Act have been raised regularly since 2014, we wanted to discuss with the Permanent Secretary recent policy decisions taken by the Welsh Government – notably in relation to Corporate Joint Committees. She said:

“[...] there are fundamental differences between corporate joint committees and the other bodies that we have. They are intended to be a vehicle for regional collaboration between local authorities, and the intention is to build on existing, successful regional arrangements and provide the basis for those to evolve.”<sup>145</sup>

**174.** We were told that with Corporate Joint Committees:

“We will have three very, very significant parts of local and national policy, so that’s transport, land-use planning, including housing, and

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<sup>143</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 110

<sup>144</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 69

<sup>145</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 203

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economic development brought together in a single governance structure”.<sup>146</sup>

**175.** A Welsh Government official told us “there were Ministers who would have said [...] ‘Do we really need this?’” but that the arguments in favour of creating the new structures were convincing.<sup>147</sup> We heard from the Welsh Government that, ultimately, Corporate Joint Committees might even replace some of the other collaborative structures:

“[...]in the longer term, we would envisage some of those other partnerships, some of those other structures, becoming redundant, actually, because the CJC’s will be taking a much more powerful overview— and a much wider overview as they settle in— that will begin to pick up some of that work of the other partnerships.”<sup>148</sup>

### Contradictory or burdensome legislative requirements

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**176.** As well as hindering collaboration, we also heard that it can be challenging for public bodies to understand and discharge their responsibilities, which are sometimes contradictory. The Future Generations Commissioner told us about the: “bureaucratic infrastructure [...] I still don’t think the Government have really got a grip of that means that we are taking people away from implementing the Act [...]”.<sup>149</sup>

**177.** The Auditor General noted that both the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 touch on planning policy. However, in some ways they do not align with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.<sup>150</sup>

**178.** An official from ABUHB told us about what she calls the “parallel universes of performance” and argued for much stronger integration of objectives under

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<sup>146</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 208

<sup>147</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 214

<sup>148</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 214

<sup>149</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 69

<sup>150</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 8

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this Act with other performance measures.<sup>151</sup> The Chief Executive of Powys County Council stressed how challenging the situation is for local authorities:

“[...] with local government our services are so wide, we are subject to so much legislation [...] sometimes the different legislation require different partnership arrangements, they bring with them different governance, they bring different funding pots and, often, will have different lead organisations, and so, for me, that is where some of the complexity and disconnect tends to come in.”<sup>152</sup>

**179.** Even if the requirements are well-understood, it is still a lot of work for public bodies to fulfil them. A Powys County Council officer explained how burdensome the regulatory and reporting framework can be:

“[...] we have to do our annual performance report; we have to do a public services board annual performance report; we have to do a regional partnership board annual report; the director of social services has to do an annual council reporting framework report; we do an annual governance statement and there are others. And in each of those reports, there is absolute alignment [...] if you did one assessment that you could align the public services to, one delivery plan and one set of reporting, with that, in itself, you’d have alignment of resource to a set of priorities that everyone could sign up to and deliver.”<sup>153</sup>

**180.** We heard similar views repeated across our evidence gathering, from public sector bodies, PSBs and from third sector organisations.

**181.** We asked the Welsh Government whether the legislative landscape was contradictory and burdensome, an official reminded us that PSBs can come together to form larger, regional Boards if they want to. He pointed to five boards in Gwent that are currently considering merging into a single PSB. However, he

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<sup>151</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 104

<sup>152</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 166

<sup>153</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 250

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acknowledged that Welsh Government could do more to explain to partnerships the flexibilities they currently have.<sup>154</sup>

## Remit letters

**182.** The Welsh Ministers issue remit letters to Welsh Government Sponsored Bodies annually to set out the strategic priorities that they should deliver with the funding that they have been allocated. Remit letters can include high-level objectives relating to the bodies' core purpose. They can also set out specific objectives for the sponsored bodies that relate to distinct projects or in response to identified policy concerns.

**183.** We heard from some public bodies the remit letters they receive from the Welsh Government do not integrate well with the principles of the Act, and framing remit letters around the five ways of working, or alongside the objectives of other public bodies or government departments, would be helpful.<sup>155</sup>

**184.** The Future Generations Commissioner agreed, suggesting remit letters do not currently require organisations to use funding within the framework of the Act.<sup>156</sup>

**185.** We heard that the Welsh Government – with input from the Commissioner – was working to make its remit letters “more strategic” and “based entirely around the five ways of working, so that, rather than having it as part of a remit letter how you’re doing with the Act, the entire remit letter is going to reflect the way the Act works.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraphs 250 and 252

<sup>155</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraphs 87 and 96

<sup>156</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 49

<sup>157</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 256

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## Public bodies that are not currently subject to the Act

**186.** Currently, 44 public bodies are subject to the Act.<sup>158</sup> The Welsh Ministers can amend the public bodies that are subject to the Act, by regulations.

**187.** In his 2020 statutory report, the Auditor General recommended that “The Welsh Government considers whether additional public bodies should be designated by Order to be subject to the Act.”<sup>159</sup> In his letter to the Committee dated 15 January 2021, he stated:

“[...] delivering on the Act requires a whole-system approach. If public bodies are going to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales it needs to be a co-ordinated effort.”<sup>160</sup>

**188.** He added since the Act was passed in 2015, there are new public bodies that could be considered for being subject to the Act. They include Health Education and Improvement Wales, Social Care Wales, and the Welsh Revenue Authority. There are also bodies that existed in 2015 that may merit inclusion, such as the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust. The letter also notes some potential anomalies. For example, the possibility of NHS Wales Informatics Service being moved from its current hosts - Velindre NHS University Trust, which is subject to the Act – to a newly proposed body which is not.<sup>161</sup>

**189.** We asked the Future Generations Commissioner whether additional public bodies should be made subject to the Act:

“It makes sense to me for the whole of the public sector to be covered by the future generations Act. Do we want another set of however

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<sup>158</sup> Legislation.gov.uk, ‘[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015: Section 6](#)’, viewed on 23 February 2021

<sup>159</sup> Auditor General for Wales, ‘[So, what’s different?](#)’, May 2020, page 51, viewed on 23 February 2021

<sup>160</sup> Auditor General for Wales, ‘[Letter to Public Accounts Committee Chair: Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015. 15 January 2021](#)’, viewed on 15 February 2021

<sup>161</sup> Auditor General for Wales, ‘[Letter to Public Accounts Committee Chair: Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015. 15 January 2021](#)’, viewed on 15 February 2021

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many plans, well-being assessments, various other things? Not necessarily.”<sup>162</sup>

**190.** We put the same question to the Permanent Secretary. She reminded us that subjecting additional public bodies to the Act would require a change to the regulations, and that “it is always open to bodies to follow the requirements of the Act, and what we’re finding is that a number of them already do that. So, they can apply the Act to themselves without formally having the Act applied to them, if you like”.<sup>163</sup>

**191.** She went on to note such public bodies can be given guidance by the Welsh Ministers, but that “a number of our arm’s-length bodies, like Transport for Wales and South Wales Police, have decided that they’re going to follow the spirit of the legislation, even though it doesn’t directly apply to them.”<sup>164</sup>

## Our view

### An overview of progress since 2015 ---

**192.** Despite all the positive rhetoric surrounding the Bill as it passed through the Assembly, the evidence that we have heard indicates that the Welsh Government was slow to translate the principles of the Act into a tangible shift in government thinking.

**193.** We believe that the Welsh Government did not show sufficient commitment to the Act in the first few years after it was passed. This set the tone for the rest of the public sector. The Welsh Government failed to convince public bodies, and indeed the public, that this legislation should drive real change to how public services are designed, developed and delivered. Consequently, public bodies did not begin the process of embedding culture change quickly enough, resulting in slow collective progress.

**Conclusion 9.** The Welsh Ministers were slow to implement and promote the Act in the years immediately after it was passed. Consequently, the Welsh civil

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<sup>162</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings. 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 94

<sup>163</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings. 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 258

<sup>164</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings. 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 262

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service did not implement the Act well enough internally and did not make it clear to public bodies that it expected them to do so too. This has been a fundamental barrier to implementation, the impact of which is still evident across the public sector today.

**194.** However, we are pleased to see that some tangible progress has been made since then. Stakeholders and public bodies told us that they sensed a shift in the Government's thinking towards the principles of the Act. As we have noted, some changes have been made to governance structures within the Welsh Government, and there seems to be more focus on sustainable development within the policy development process.

**Conclusion 10.** Despite a slow start, the Welsh Government has made tangible progress in adopting the Act since around 2017. We welcome the emphasis that the First Minister and the Permanent Secretary have placed on the importance of implementing the Act successfully and are encouraged by structural changes made in pursuit of the Act and awareness raising activities within the Welsh Government.

**195.** However, we are still unconvinced that the Act is sufficiently embedded across the Welsh Government Civil Service. We were very surprised to hear, amongst all the advice and challenge that is given to Ministers, that the Permanent Secretary could not identify one instance of where officials had challenged Ministers on consistency of policy with this Act.

**196.** We found this even more surprising in the context of Corporate Joint Committees. Most public bodies and stakeholders that contributed to this inquiry raised concerns about the number of partnerships in Welsh public services, as did the Commissioner, the Auditor General, a Government-led review and, potentially, even some Ministers.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, the Welsh Government Civil Service still did not question whether the creation of a new partnership body might undermine the Act. Recommendations 9 and 10 below consider the complexity of partnership arrangements in Welsh public services.

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<sup>165</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21', paragraph 214

**197.** We recognise that the Government's response to the pandemic has been shaped by the kind of collaborative and integrated thinking prescribed by the Well-being of Future Generations Act. We welcome this and hope that this reflects culture change within the organisation, rather than a happy coincidence.

**198.** As a matter of ongoing concern, we feel that it is too early to draw conclusions about the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic. We are sure, however, that these issues will be revisited by the Public Accounts Committee and other relevant committees as part of their work on the pandemic in the Sixth Senedd.

### Restating commitment to this Act

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**199.** We believe that the Welsh Government needs to restate its expectations of public bodies. This is more critical as we recover from Covid-19 than ever before. We believe that the Welsh Government should prioritise action in three, specific areas to lay the foundations for success over the next five years:

- 1.** National Indicators and milestones.
- 2.** Reviewing the public bodies subject to the Act.
- 3.** Remit letters.

### National Indicators and Milestones

**200.** We believe the national indicators and milestones are crucial for measuring the successful implementation of this legislation. They will make it clear to public bodies that this Act is important to the Government. They will also clarify for public bodies and the public what the Welsh Government expects to achieve and by when. We welcome the recent statement from the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip confirming the Welsh Government's commitment to progressing this body of work forwards.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Welsh Government, 'Written Statement: Shaping Wales' Future: Delivering National Well-being Milestones and National Well-being Indicators and a report on Wales' future', 19 February 2021, viewed on 22 February 2021

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 5.** The Welsh Government must continue with plans to set and publish milestones as required by section 10 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 no later than six months after the 2021 Senedd election.

**201.** We agree with Colegau Cymru that the Government should carry out a review of the national indicators in light of the pandemic. The context within which public services will be delivered over the next five years is fundamentally different to when the indicators were first published in 2016. The Government is right to commit to doing so, as the Deputy Minister and Chief Whip set out on her February 2021 statement and associated roadmap. In doing so, we urge the Welsh Government to take the time to consult public bodies, the public and the many voluntary and private sector organisations that have so much to contribute to this legislation and to the pandemic recovery. As a first step to a sustainable recovery from Covid-19, it is vital that the Government gets this crucial piece of work right.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 6.** The Welsh Government must continue with plans to review and publish revised national well-being indicators no later than six months after the 2021 Senedd election. The review should recognise the challenges and opportunities presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and take into account the views of public bodies, the public, and key stakeholders of the private and voluntary sectors.

### **Reviewing the public bodies subject to the Act**

**202.** As we look at the list of 44 bodies currently subject to the Act, alongside other bodies that are not, we are not convinced that there is a clear and obvious rationale for the exclusion of some and inclusion of others.

**203.** We are also not convinced by the argument that public bodies who are not subject to the Act can realistically be expected to adopt it voluntarily.

**204.** This is not to say that we necessarily believe more public bodies should be subject to the Act. That is a policy matter for the Welsh Government. We are also conscious of the monitoring, auditing and reporting requirements that come with being added to that list.

**205.** However, we believe that a review of the public bodies that should fall under this Act is timely, and would contribute to the body of work restating the Welsh Government's commitment to this legislation. We believe public bodies' implementation of this Act depends on confidence that there is a consistency and logic about how the legislation is implemented, and by whom.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 7.** The Welsh Government must carry out a review of the public bodies that are subject to the Act. The findings of that review should be implemented in sufficient time for any newly added public bodies to receive their funding allocations and associated remit letters for the 2022-23 financial year. The review should:

- take into account the impact on the implementation of the Act at a national level that including/omitting any particular public body would have;
- acknowledge that the inclusion of any additional public bodies will result in additional reporting, monitoring and auditing requirements that will inevitably have financial/resourcing implications;
- clearly set out the expectations of public bodies that are not formally subject to the Act in relation to sustainable development, and how those expectations will be monitored and enforced; and
- clearly set out the criteria against which inclusion/exclusion decisions were made and the process or timeframes by which future reviews will be initiated.

### Remit letters

**206.** We have heard throughout this inquiry of the importance of aligning funding and strategic priorities for public bodies with the principles of the Act.

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We recognise that some elements of the funding allocation process are not entirely within the Welsh Government's control (for example, the total funding allocated to Wales from the UK Government in the form of the Welsh Block Grant, or its corresponding funding cycles). However, the Welsh Government does have control over the content of the remit letters that it issues to sponsored bodies.

**207.** We welcome the Welsh Government's intention to review the format of remit letters with a view to framing them around the five ways of working. This is a very positive step. We look forward to reviewing the newly framed remit letters when they are issued to public bodies.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 8.** The Welsh Government must continue with plans to frame remit letters around the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, following consultation with the Future Generations Commissioner. The new remit letters should be in use no later than in relation to the 2022-23 financial year.

### Clarifying the complex landscape of partnership bodies

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**208.** We note that the 2020 'Review of Strategic Partnerships' led by the Welsh Local Government Association and the Welsh Government did not conclude that any specific partnership bodies should be abolished (although, we also note that this review did not consider the impact of Corporate Joint Committees).<sup>167</sup> We did not hear any significant calls for specific partnership bodies to be abolished during our inquiry.

**209.** However, it was obvious from the evidence we heard that, overall, public bodies think that there are too many partnership structures. Even if they have found ways to navigate them, the legislative landscape is claustrophobic, with

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<sup>167</sup> Welsh Government, Welsh Local Government Association and the NHS confederation, '[Review of Strategic Partnerships](#)', July 2020, viewed on 10 February 2021

mixed messages, different interpretations of key concepts across different Acts, and conflicting performance measures.

**210.** We also note that, as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill passed through the Assembly, the Welsh Government implied that there could be significantly fewer than 22 Public Services Boards, reducing their collective bureaucracy. Although three pairs of PSBs have merged, leaving 19 PSBs in total, this is still significantly more than the 11 or 12 that were mentioned during a Plenary debate in 2014.<sup>168</sup>

**Conclusion 11.** The complex and bureaucratic landscape of partnership bodies and plethora of legislative and reporting requirements has made it more difficult for public bodies to adopt this Act and has, at times, actively disincentivised it.

**211.** We cannot reiterate strongly enough the calls from the Future Generations Commissioner, the Auditor General for Wales, the Welsh Government/Welsh Local Government Association review and others that no new partnership structures should be created without fully exploring whether existing structures can fulfil the required functions.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 9.** The Welsh Government must not create any new partnership or collaborative structures to fulfil any functions unless it has fully explored whether:

- existing partnership structures could undertake those functions instead;
- the new structure could replace existing ones;
- the functions can be carried out by existing public bodies; and

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<sup>168</sup> Senedd Cymru, 'Record of Proceedings: Plenary 08/07/14', page 45, viewed on 2 March 2021

- after consultation with public bodies affected by the proposed changes, can demonstrate support for the new structures from a majority of public bodies affected by them.

**212.** We were interested to note that the Welsh Government envisaged that Corporate Joint Committees may lead to other partnership structures becoming redundant. This raises important questions for public bodies, particularly those which contribute to the work of existing partnership structures. The evidence we have received has led us to support the simplification of the partnership landscape. We are, therefore, broadly supportive of the steps hinted at by the Welsh Government. However, these steps must be taken openly, transparently, and after full consultation with public bodies themselves.

**213.** The Welsh Government acknowledged that more could be done to set out to the various partnership structures the degree of flexibility they have to organise themselves more efficiently.<sup>169</sup> We believe that this guidance could be extended to clarify where reporting and other compliance arrangements could be consolidated to reduce the administrative burden on member organisations.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 10.** The Welsh Government must publish guidance no later than six months after the next Senedd election that sets out:

- how the work of Regional Partnership Boards, Public Services Boards, Corporate Joint Committees, alongside other major partnership structures, interact with each other within the framework of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, with examples of good practice;
- what flexibility partnerships have to make decisions to better and more efficiently organise themselves;

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<sup>169</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21', paragraph 207

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- where partnerships and organisations can take action to simplify or consolidate the governance and reporting structures to reduce repetition and duplication; and
- the Welsh Government's view of the landscape of partnership structures over the next reporting period (2020-25), including any proposals to abolish or consolidate those structures.

## 6. Other barriers

In this chapter, we pick up other potential barriers to implementation since 2015. These issues are cross-cutting, feed into the barriers considered elsewhere in this report, and provide additional context that provide further insight into the progress made in implementing the Act across the public sector.

### Covid-19

The impact on public bodies to date

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**214.** We asked public bodies whether they felt that the pandemic had affected their implementation of the Act since the outbreak of Covid-19 in early 2020. We were told about the financial and resourcing impact of the pandemic, and its impact on public bodies' work. We heard Covid-19 has:

“[...] meant delays in delivering some of our priority work streams that we'd had before, whether we're dealing with the front-line issues of COVID or whether we're dealing with staff absences or supporting our staff working at home and home schooling and so on”.<sup>170</sup>

**215.** The Interim Director of the Welsh Blood Service agreed, explaining :

“I'm in a position where keeping the wheels on the bus currently is quite hard within a COVID environment, and then bringing people into a conversation about future well-being in the middle of a pandemic is difficult to do.”<sup>171</sup>

**216.** We were also told that the voluntary sector is facing particularly acute challenges. Wales Council for Voluntary Action told us that “Covid-19 has seen

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<sup>170</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21', paragraph 170

<sup>171</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21', paragraph 131

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the income of many organisations fall sharply, leading to a decrease in service provision and cuts in staff numbers.” It argues that this will impact on the voluntary sector’s capacity to implement the Act.<sup>172</sup>

**217.** However, for many, Covid-19 has accelerated the adoption and implementation of the Act. National Museum Wales told us about how they have been working in new ways with health boards during Covid-19.<sup>173</sup> Velindre University NHS Trust told us about innovations in radiotherapy, working alongside cancer patients, and renewed collaboration with patients in relation to convalescent plasma.<sup>174</sup> Natural Resources Wales told us about new opportunities for public bodies and PSBs to work alongside the third sector to take advantage of communities’ support for vulnerable people.<sup>175</sup>

**218.** The Pembrokeshire Together for Change Programme stated that:

“Covid-19 has a ‘silver lining’ that is pushing to the fore the need for the sectors to work together in a co-productive way, and one that is inclusive and cognisant of the needs of local communities [...] Barriers to the implementation of the Act do exist, but we have seen those barriers starting to break down in Pembrokeshire [...] progress and change are no longer options.”<sup>176</sup>

**219.** We were encouraged to hear that the pandemic has led to a shift, or acceleration, in the Welsh Government’s own implementation of the Act. The Future Generations Commissioner told us about the Welsh Government’s budget improvement plan, which sets out how Welsh Government expenditure aligns with its well-being objectives within the context of the pandemic. Even so, she cautioned her optimism with encouragement for the government to “step up the pace” and make the plan “more purposeful”.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Written evidence: [FGA17 Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#)

<sup>173</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 18

<sup>174</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 14

<sup>175</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 171

<sup>176</sup> Written evidence: [FGA27 Pembrokeshire Together for Change Programme](#)

<sup>177</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraphs 123 and 124

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**220.** The Permanent Secretary said the pandemic had led to the “strengthening and embedding of the well-being of future generations approach to policy making and implementation”. She noted the structural changes within the Welsh Government that align with the Act, before concluding that “the virus has accelerated a natural development of our approach to the five ways of working, and it’s really helping to embed the Act in the way that we do things in the Welsh Government.”<sup>178</sup>

### Recovery from Covid-19: looking to the future

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**221.** We have heard from many that the pandemic is an opportunity for Wales to rebuild its public services sustainably. The Chief Executive of Isle of Anglesey County Council told us:

“In my opinion, the Act now, in emerging from COVID, is more important than ever before. It’s more important because you want a prosperous Wales, a resilient Wales, a healthy Wales, a more equal Wales, and I think that those are core principles not only for Wales, but for every country throughout the world. We’ve learned a lot of lessons and that’s what we want as a nation as we emerge from the pandemic. The way to do that with fewer resources is that we all have to work together, and the Act’s five ways of working are more important than ever post COVID.”<sup>179</sup>

**222.** The Future Generations Commissioner agreed, telling us that “the Act should be front and centre, in terms of the Welsh Government’s response and, I suppose, reconstruction, post pandemic”.<sup>180</sup> She told us she was “pleased” that the Welsh Government’s policy approach has reflected the five priority areas for reconstruction that she and her office have outlined.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraphs 146 - 148

<sup>179</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 130

<sup>180</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 12

<sup>181</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 12

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**223.** The Permanent Secretary told us that “[...] the virus has accelerated a natural development of our approach to the five ways of working, and it’s really helping to embed the Act in the way that we do things”.<sup>182</sup>

**224.** However, we were reminded by many of the challenges that will face the Welsh public service as it looks to recover from Covid-19, many of which were present before the pandemic. Coleg Gwent and Inspire Training students stated that “A lot of Wales is poor, more opportunities are needed and offered to those living in poverty”. The students went on to raise concerns over the impact of racial bias, class barriers and poverty on pursuit of a ‘more equal Wales’.<sup>183</sup>

**225.** For some, these trends have been exacerbated by the pandemic. A National Museum Wales official told us that Covid-19 has “cast a lightning sheet across the landscape in Wales, of poverty, exclusion, all the social challenges that we’re very well aware of [...]”.<sup>184</sup> Public Health Wales agreed, warning us that “COVID will have a much greater impact on the indirect broader harms of population health, early years, et cetera, than the infection in its own right”.<sup>185</sup>

## Our view: Covid-19

**226.** This inquiry was conducted as public bodies in Wales were focused on their immediate response to Covid-19. It is therefore not appropriate – and too early – for us to conclude whether the pandemic is a barrier to its implementation.

**227.** Covid-19 has clearly had a staggering impact on how public services are delivered. It has forced public bodies to collaborate and involve others in new ways and with unprecedented urgency. We were not surprised to hear from many public bodies that the pandemic had accelerated their adoption of the Act in some areas.

**228.** However, we were regularly reminded of the disastrous impact of Covid-19 not only for public health, but for educational inequality, joblessness,

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<sup>182</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 148

<sup>183</sup> Written evidence: [Delivering for future generations: the story so far. Summary of engagement with young people](#)

<sup>184</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 25

<sup>185</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 165

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homelessness, poverty, etc. We are only too aware that addressing these issues is at the heart of long-term, integrated and preventative public services.

**229.** Although we do not underestimate the scale of the challenge ahead, public bodies must build their recovery from Covid-19 around the principle of this Act.

## RECOMMENDATION

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**Recommendation 11.** Public bodies subject to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 must ensure that the five ways of working are embedded in their plans for recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. We recommend that any gains they have made in their immediate response to the pandemic are not lost, and that they shift their focus from the day-to-day to long-term and prevention.

## The work of the Auditor General for Wales

**230.** The Auditor General's role under the Act is to examine public bodies to assess whether they have acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when setting, and taking steps to meeting, their well-being objectives. The Auditor General must examine each of the 44 public bodies subject to the Act at least once in each 'reporting period'. In practice, this means that each public body is usually examined at least once every five years.

**231.** The Auditor General's report summarises that his role is to look at "the way public bodies have planned and carried out their work".<sup>186</sup> Or, as he told us in Committee:

"What we are effectively doing here is trying to audit organisational behaviour and culture, and that's a very different space for us to operate in, a very different space for any audit institution to operate in."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Auditor General for Wales, '[So, what's different?](#)', May 2020, page 12, viewed on 15 February 2021

<sup>187</sup> Public Accounts Committee, '[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)', paragraph 24

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**232.** The Auditor General's 2020 report explains that Audit Wales' approach to examining public bodies other than the Welsh Government during the first five years has been to carry out "detailed examinations of how the sustainable development principle has been applied in relationship to specific activities ('steps')", alongside gathering information from its other local and national studies.<sup>188</sup> Audit Wales has generally examined one specific activity per public body (a 'single step' approach).

**233.** The Auditor General took different approach to the statutory examination of the Welsh Government. Unlike the 'single step' approach taken with other 43 public bodies subject to the Act, his 2019 report explains that "Given the breadth of the Welsh Government's responsibilities, we selected a step led by a policy division in each of its three main groups".<sup>189</sup> The Auditor General explained to us that this 'three step' approach was a reflection of the size and breadth of responsibilities of the Welsh Government.<sup>190</sup>

**234.** We asked public bodies for their views about how the Auditor General has approached his work.

**235.** Swansea Council told us that there was "confusion/duplication between the roles of the FG Commissioner and Audit Wales". It went on to note that the 'single step' examinations appear "contrived" and that a better approach would be to "examine the application of the Act in broad terms looking at value for money".<sup>191</sup>

**236.** Others disagreed. The Chief Executive of Natural Resources Wales told us:

"[...] the auditor general and Audit Wales have come in and, I think, done a really useful piece of work looking at how it's working and what the issues are, and I think that level of independent scrutiny and thought was very welcome. So, I would see [the roles of the Auditor

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<sup>188</sup> Auditor General for Wales, '[So, what's different?](#)', May 2020, page 5, viewed on 12 February 2021

<sup>189</sup> Auditor General for Wales, '[Implementing the Well-being of Future Generations Act - Welsh Government](#)', November 2019, page 7, viewed on 15 February 2021

<sup>190</sup> Public Accounts Committee, '[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)', paragraph 18

<sup>191</sup> Written evidence, [FGA07 Swansea Council](#)

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General for Wales and the Future Generations Commissioner] as being very distinct [...]”.<sup>192</sup>

**237.** The Chief Executive of Powys County Council agreed that Audit Wales’ work was valuable. She told us “when we receive reports from the auditor general or from some of the other inspectorates, we know that they’re on the way— we’ve worked with them on the content, we’ve been interviewed, we’ve had meetings with them, they’ve been observing our work.”<sup>193</sup> She added that “we’ve got excellent links with Audit Wales. They’ve got clearly designated officers working on different elements of the work with us. [...] their work certainly is effective and adds value.”<sup>194</sup>

**238.** The Permanent Secretary said:

“[...] officials at all levels in the Welsh Government have regular contact with the auditor general and with his team. And we are very grateful for them. I see it as a very strong relationship— one that is certainly important to me and I hope is of value to them as well.”<sup>195</sup>

**239.** She clarified that the Welsh Government had “very much welcomed his report as well, and previous reports that [he and the Future Generations Commissioner] have produced”. She added the Auditor General and the Commissioner had spoken to the senior leadership of the Welsh Government Civil Service and the Public Leaders’ Forum to improve understanding of the Act.<sup>196</sup>

**240.** We asked the Auditor General about the different feedback we had received from public bodies about the single step examination approach. He explained that the purpose of the ‘single step’ approach was to “make sure that we engage with the operational reality of the business of different public bodies, rather than

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<sup>192</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 292

<sup>193</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 213

<sup>194</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 232

<sup>195</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 278

<sup>196</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 278

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staying purely at a corporate level.”<sup>197</sup> He added that it would not be practicable to offer a view on all of the services provided by each of the 44 public bodies.

**241.** We heard that the ‘single step’ approach had been developed with the public bodies. The purpose was to examine whether the Act was embedded throughout the organisation – from top to bottom.<sup>198</sup>

**242.** We pushed the Auditor General on whether he felt that, with hindsight, taking the reverse approach would have been better: starting with a more strategic look at the corporate approach, before examining specific projects in detail at a later date once public bodies have had time to translate the legislation into real change at project delivery level.

**243.** The Auditor General was confident that he had taken the right approach. An Audit Wales official told us its survey of public bodies had asked “what they thought of the work we’ve done [...] overall, we’re broadly satisfied with the responses we got on that.”<sup>199</sup> The Auditor General suggested that “most public bodies feel as though we took appropriate steps to get to know and contextualise our work and understand their work [...] we can undoubtedly improve, this this is very, very novel territory for us as auditors as well as for public bodies.”<sup>200</sup>

**244.** In September 2020, Audit Wales consulted public bodies about how the Auditor General should approach his examinations during the second reporting cycle (2020-25). The consultation document set out that the Auditor General is minded to incorporate his examinations under this Act into his value for money and local audit work. It also proposed strengthening and expanding the co-ordination of his office with that of the Future Generations Commissioner.<sup>201</sup>

**245.** The Auditor General explained that he hoped to “give greater focus to higher level corporate embedding of the ways of working, and look for evidence

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<sup>197</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 18

<sup>198</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 19

<sup>199</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraphs 19 to 22

<sup>200</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 24

<sup>201</sup> Auditor General for Wales, ‘[Delivering the Auditor General’s Examinations, 2020-25](#)’, September 2020, page 8, viewed on 16 February 2021

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of genuine commitment at a senior level” as part of his next round of examinations.<sup>202</sup>

## Our view: the work of the Auditor General for Wales

**246.** We were pleased to hear the (largely) positive views expressed by public bodies about the work of Audit Wales under this Act. Most of the public bodies and stakeholders we heard from understood the Auditor General’s role and believed that he and his office had undertaken it appropriately.

**247.** We were also encouraged that Audit Wales seem to have adopted many of the Act’s ways of working that they themselves are required to audit in others. In particular, we note the significant amount of effort that it has invested in working alongside public bodies to develop its audit strategy. We applaud this collaborative spirit, particularly during the Act’s first reporting cycle.

**248.** The five ways of working must take centre stage as we look to make real gains in sustainable development. The Auditor General for Wales is responsible for assessing the extent to which public bodies have adopted the sustainable development principle when setting and working towards their well-being objectives. In practice, this means that he is responsible for assessing whether bodies are adopting the five ways of working.

**249.** The Auditor General therefore plays a crucial role in supporting the implementation of this Act.

**250.** We appreciate that carrying out examinations under this Act is a new role for public sector auditors. However, as the public sector looks to rebuild from Covid-19, we urge the Auditor General to raise his expectations of public bodies. Their collective progress to date has been too slow. We cannot afford for that to continue.

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<sup>202</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 18

## RECOMMENDATION

**Recommendation 12.** As we enter the second reporting period, the Auditor General for Wales must raise his expectations of public bodies and not hesitate to highlight poor adoption of the sustainable development principle.

## Brexid

**251.** We raised Brexit with public bodies and stakeholders to determine whether they would cite the uncertainty surrounding Britain's future relationship with the European Union as a barrier to the implementation of the Act.

**252.** Some witnesses referred to potential financial challenges resulting from Brexit. The Permanent Secretary pointed to the "great deal of uncertainty that we're all facing, due not only to the Covid-19 situation, but also how the transition path is going forward with a new relationship with our key trading partners in the European Union and elsewhere."<sup>203</sup> A potential loss, and lack of replacement, of specific EU funding was also noted in evidence.

**253.** A representative of Ceredigion County Council, suggested that responding to Brexit had led to public bodies making "more here and now decisions on a daily basis."<sup>204</sup> The Auditor General agreed, telling us implementing the Act in the current climate is "enormously challenging":

"[...] especially at a time when we have a kind of perfect storm of COVID, of departure from the EU, of deep inequalities, of climate change, et cetera, et cetera, to shift organisational behaviour and funding decisions away from short-term activity to more preventative forms of spend"<sup>205</sup>

**254.** Wales Council for Voluntary Action argued that UK legislation that has been introduced because of Brexit could make it more difficult to implement policy tailored to local communities:

<sup>203</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21', paragraph 265

<sup>204</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21', paragraph 87

<sup>205</sup> Public Accounts Committee, 'Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20', paragraph 99

“The Internal Markets Bill represents a fundamental threat to successful delivery of the Act. At an overarching level this legislation would make it more difficult for Wales to introduce policies that are tailored to local requirements [...] The UK Internal Market Bill’s own regulatory impact assessment acknowledges that societal benefits that might have been achieved through local policies may not be achievable under this legislation, but views this as an acceptable cost if it results in greater UK wide economic efficiency.”<sup>206</sup>

**255.** For others, the impact of Brexit on the implementation of the Act is still unclear.<sup>207</sup>

## Our view: Brexit

**256.** Inevitably, public bodies, including the Welsh Government, have faced uncertainties about the UK’s future trading relationship with the European Union since Britain voted to leave in 2016. An array of decisions that impact Welsh public services have been made at short notice since then. It is still unclear what the effect of leaving the EU and the subsequent changes in UK legislation will be for public bodies.

**257.** We acknowledge this upheaval, and recognise the additional challenges that public bodies have faced when planning for the long-term in the context of Brexit.

**258.** However, we do not accept that Brexit has been a barrier to implementation of the Act. We do not believe it has presented any barriers that are so substantial to justify slow adoption of the principles of sustainable development. To be fair to the public bodies that contributed to our inquiry, very few suggested otherwise.

**Conclusion 12.** The uncertainty surrounding Brexit has undoubtedly made it more challenging for public bodies to plan for the future. However, the full impact of leaving the EU on Welsh public services is still unknown.

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<sup>206</sup> Written evidence: [FCA17.Wales Council for Voluntary Action](#)

<sup>207</sup> See: Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 14, or written evidence: [FCA02.Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority](#)

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## Tensions between centralisation and localisation

**259.** The Wales Centre for Public Policy outlined the importance of the relationship between locally based public bodies, such as Public Services Boards (PSBs), and national bodies, such as the Welsh Government or the Future Generations Commissioner. Its submission identified that some local bodies felt that flexibility for local implementation was limited by the oversight role of the Future Generations Commissioner. Conversely, it also identified that other local bodies wanted more central guidance and funding. The paper notes that “getting the right balance between local autonomy and central guidance has been highlighted by studies of sustainable development policy implementation elsewhere”.<sup>208</sup>

**260.** The balance between local service delivery and central support and oversight has been a theme throughout our inquiry. We have heard consistently that public bodies and PSBs must engage with their communities to ensure that their approach to public service delivery is appropriate for local needs. For some, this is not happening enough. Solva Care, for example, suggested “Public Services Boards in particular seem to have little to do with local communities, they do not seem to report to them nor do they request evidence from them.”<sup>209</sup>

**261.** For others, the problem lies in the “increasing centralisation of services”, which does not align with the value people place on access to local services, particularly during a crisis.<sup>210</sup>

**262.** We have heard from public bodies themselves that freedom to work flexibly to meet local need is important, particularly for PSBs. As we explored in Chapter 3 of this report, there is value in flexibility about how public bodies’ can use their funding so they can tailor how they deploy their resources. A Ceredigion County Council official told us how a project that was initiated by local PSBs alongside

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<sup>208</sup> Wales Centre for Public Policy, ‘[Submission to the Public Accounts Committee’s Enquiry on the Barriers to Implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)’, January 2021, viewed on 15 February 2021

<sup>209</sup> Written evidence: [FCA14 Solva Care](#)

<sup>210</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 14/12/20](#)’, paragraph 266

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other partners, was able to be scaled up to tackle similar issues across the region.<sup>211</sup>

**263.** This chimed with the evidence from the Welsh Government:

“We want the right local solutions to be in place. I think, in many areas, what we certainly don’t want to do is to impose central or national structures when they are not appropriate for dealing with some of these really difficult multi-organisational, multipartner issues.”<sup>212</sup>

**264.** However, as we explored early in this report, we heard about the importance of Welsh Government policy being consistent with the Act.<sup>213</sup> We note the number of public bodies that requested more support from the Future Generations Commissioner, as explored in Chapter 5, and the value placed by many witnesses on sharing best practice across the country – often with the support of central bodies.<sup>214</sup> Local implementation and interpretation are clearly critical, but it seems that central oversight and support are too.

## Our view: tensions between centralisation and localisation

**265.** Positive relationships and trust between public bodies and other stakeholders involved in public service delivery is critical to the implementation of this legislation. Similarly, public bodies must have a strong relationships with regional public service partnerships, national bodies, and central government.

**266.** We welcome the Welsh Government’s commitment to local delivery of this Act, which we believe is absolutely essential to getting public services right for local communities across Wales.

**267.** However, it is clear that public bodies also need to perceive that the Act is central to decision-making within central government. Trust between layers of government is dependent on decisions about the funding, operation and

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<sup>211</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraph 53

<sup>212</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 01/02/21](#)’, paragraph 252

<sup>213</sup> Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 11/01/21](#)’, paragraph 137

<sup>214</sup> See, for example, Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 18/01/21](#)’, paragraphs 151 and 156, or Public Accounts Committee, ‘[Record of Proceedings, 25/01/21](#)’, paragraph 38

governance of public services pointing consistently towards the principles of sustainable development.

## 7. A final word: the role of the Senedd

**268.** It is important to reflect on the Senedd's role in implementing this legislation. We have discussed the various barriers to the implementation of this Act. Many of those barriers – such as the complexity of the legislative landscape in Wales and the array of partnership structures – are in place because they were approved by the Senedd.

**269.** Similarly, the Welsh Government's leadership has been cited by some as a barrier to the implementation of this legislation. Again, responsibility for holding the Welsh Government to account sits primarily with the Senedd.

**270.** In the introductory chapter of this report, we noted that this is the first time that the Senedd has scrutinised how successfully the Act has been implemented by all of the bodies with responsibilities under it. This is difficult to justify given its impact on public services. Similarly, we also note that no post-legislative scrutiny of this Act has taken place since it was passed in 2015.

**271.** The Public Accounts Committee has led this particular inquiry. Our work is limited by our remit: scrutiny of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which public money is used. Our focus must be on implementation, not policy. None of the Senedd's policy committees have a broad enough remit to consider such a holistic piece of legislation. Although this was a substantial and broad inquiry, there were many important issues that we did not consider in detail because they were outside our remit. For example:

- The policy intent sitting behind the Act.
- The drafting of the legislation (for example, a number of significant concerns relating to the legislation itself were raised by Bangor Law School, Public Law Research Group, which unfortunately we could not pursue as part of this inquiry<sup>215</sup>).
- Any Ministerial or overtly policy decisions, such as:

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<sup>215</sup> Written evidence: [FCA47 Bangor Law School, Public Law Research Group](#)



- detailed consideration of whether specific Government policy decisions are congruent with the Act;
- which public bodies should and should not be subject to the Act; and
- whether the Welsh Government has identified the right National Indicators or Milestones.

**272.** These are important areas of scrutiny that should be taken up early in the Sixth Senedd.

**273.** As we move into recovery from the pandemic, the Senedd will need to consider how it should approach scrutiny of matters that cross over policy boundaries or ministerial portfolios. This challenge is evident in government as well as in parliament, as the post of Counsel General and Minister for European Transition illustrates.

**274.** The Business Committee of the Senedd is responsible for the organisation of Senedd Business. Its role is to “facilitate the effective organisation of Senedd proceedings” as stated in Standing Order 11.1.<sup>216</sup>

**275.** We therefore urge the Business Committee of the Sixth Senedd to do what it can to enable the Senedd to hold the Welsh Government to account for its implementation of this Act and other cross-cutting legislation and policy. It is then the responsibility of the Sixth Senedd as a whole to ensure that it does so.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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**Recommendation 13.** The Business Committee of the Sixth Senedd should ensure that the Senedd’s Committee structure facilitates effective scrutiny of legislation such as the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and other matters that cross policy areas and Ministerial portfolios.

**Recommendation 14.** The Business Committee of the Sixth Senedd should give specific consideration to how post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of

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<sup>216</sup> Senedd Cymru, ‘[Business Committee](#)’, viewed on 24 February 2021

Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 should be undertaken, and refer that body of work to an appropriate Committee or forum accordingly.

## Annex A: Key terms and phrases

Although we will try to avoid jargon throughout this report wherever possible, there are some terms and phrases that have a specific meaning in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. We will also shorten some official titles and names to avoid repetition. The meanings of terms that may not be immediately obvious are set out below.

Term/phrase	Definition
<b>“the Commissioner’s office” or “the Future Generations Office” or “the office of the Future Generations Commissioner”</b>	The office of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales provides staff and resources for the Commissioner’s work and advises the Commissioner.
<b>“the Act”</b>	The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
<b>“Audit Wales”</b>	Audit Wales is the collective name of the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office.
<b>“the Auditor General”</b>	The Auditor General for Wales, who audits and reports on Welsh public bodies.
<b>“five ways of working”</b>	<p>The Act identifies five ways of working which can support the well-being of future generations. They are:</p> <p>Long-term: the importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.</p> <p>Prevention: prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.</p> <p>Integration: considering how public bodies’ wellbeing objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.</p> <p>Collaboration: acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body meet its well-being objectives.</p>

Term/phrase	Definition
	Involvement: the importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the body serves. <sup>217</sup>
<b>“the Future Generations Commissioner” or “the Commissioner”</b>	The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales.
<b>“public body” or “public bodies subject to the Act”</b>	<p>One of the 44 public services organisations that are subject to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the Welsh Ministers,</li> <li>▪ Welsh local authorities,</li> <li>▪ Welsh Health Boards,</li> <li>▪ Public Health Wales,</li> <li>▪ Velindre University NHS Trust,</li> <li>▪ Welsh National Park authorities,</li> <li>▪ Welsh fire and rescue authorities,</li> <li>▪ Natural Resources Wales,</li> <li>▪ the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales,</li> <li>▪ Arts Council of Wales,</li> <li>▪ Sports Wales,</li> <li>▪ The National Library of Wales, and</li> <li>▪ National Museum Wales.</li> </ul>
<b>“Public Services Boards” or “PSBs” or “Boards”</b>	<p>Boards that bring together representatives of public sector bodies created by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of its area. The members of Public Services Boards are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the local authority;</li> <li>▪ the Local Health Board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area;</li> <li>▪ the Welsh fire and rescue authority for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area; and</li> <li>▪ National Resources Wales.</li> </ul>

<sup>217</sup> Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, ‘[Future Generations framework for projects](#)’, November 2018, pages 6 to 10, viewed on 12 February 2021

Term/phrase	Definition
	The Act created 22 Public Services Boards, one for each local authority in Wales. Since 2015, three pairs of Public Services Boards have merged. There are now 19 boards covering the whole of Wales.
<b>“the statutory reports”</b>	The reports by the Future Generations Commissioner and by Audit Wales that prompted this inquiry. Both reports were published in May 2020 and set out the work carried out by both offices in the preceding three and five years respectively. More information about the reports can be found in the Introduction to this report.
<b>“Wales Audit Office”</b>	The Wales Audit Office provides staff and other resources for the Auditor General’s work and monitors and advises the Auditor General.
<b>“well-being goals”</b>	<p>There are seven well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A prosperous Wales.</li> <li>▪ A resilient Wales.</li> <li>▪ A healthier Wales.</li> <li>▪ A more equal Wales.</li> <li>▪ A Wales of cohesive communities.</li> <li>▪ A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.</li> <li>▪ A globally responsible Wales.</li> </ul>

## Annex B: Contributors to this inquiry

The table below sets out the organisations that contributed to this inquiry, whether by attending our stakeholder event on 12 October 2020, submitting written evidence, or by giving oral evidence during Committee meetings.

In total, 98 organisations contributed to this inquiry.

A full list of Committee meetings associated with this inquiry, including transcripts and video links, can be found on the [inquiry home page](#).

Consultation responses can be found [on the consultation page](#).

Organisation	Attended stakeholder event	Sent written evidence	Appeared before Committee
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Aware Wales	✓		
Afallen		✓	
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	✓	✓	✓
Auditor General for Wales			✓
Bangor Law School Public Law Research Group		✓	
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board		✓	
Bevan Foundation	✓		
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	✓		
Blaenau Gwent Public Services Board		✓	
Bridgend Public Services Board	✓	✓	
Building Communities' Trust		✓	
Caerphilly County Borough Council	✓		
Caerphilly Public Services Board	✓		
Canal and River Trust	✓		
Cardiff & Vale University Health Board	✓	✓	
Care & Repair Cymru		✓	
Carmarthenshire County Council		✓	
Carmarthenshire Public Services Board	✓	✓	

Ceredigion County Council	✓	✓	✓
Ceredigion Public Services Board	✓	✓	✓
Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management		✓	
Churches Together in Wales		✓	
Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru	✓		✓
Coed Cadw Woodland Trust	✓	✓	
Coleg Gwent (Crosskeys Campus)		✓	
Colegau Cymru	✓	✓	
Community Energy Wales	✓		
Community Housing Cymru	✓		
Community Transport Association	✓	✓	
Confederation of Forest Industries (Confor)	✓		
Constructing Excellence Wales		✓	
Conwy County Borough Council		✓	
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	✓		
Cytûn - Churches Together in Wales		✓	
The School Health Research Network	✓		
Denbighshire County Council	✓	✓	
Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales		✓	
Flintshire County Council		✓	✓
Flintshire Public Services Board			✓
Future Generations Commissioner for Wales		✓	✓
Gwynedd and Isle of Anglesey Public Services Board		✓	✓
Gwynedd Council		✓	
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales	✓		
Home Builders Federation	✓		
Hywel Dda University Health Board	✓	✓	
Inspire Training		✓	

Isle of Anglesey County Council		✓	✓
Marine Conservation Society		✓	
Meeting of Friends in Wales (Quakers)		✓	
Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority		✓	
Monmouthshire Public Services Board		✓	
National Farmers' Union	✓		
National Library of Wales	✓		✓
National Museum of Wales			✓
Natural Resources Wales	✓	✓	✓
Neath Port Talbot Public Services Board		✓	
Newport Public Services Board		✓	
NSPCC	✓		
NUS Cymru	✓		
Oxfam Cymru	✓	✓	
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority	✓	✓	✓
Pembrokeshire County Council		✓	
Pembrokeshire Public Services Board		✓	✓
Pembrokeshire Together for Change Programme		✓	
Planning Aid Wales	✓		
Powys County Council	✓	✓	✓
Powys Public Services Board			✓
Powys Teaching Health Board	✓	✓	
Public Health Wales	✓	✓	✓
Race Council Cymru	✓		
Renew Wales	✓		
Royal National Institute of Blind People	✓		
Royal Town Planning Institute		✓	
Royal Society for the Protection of Bird Cymru	✓		
Royal Town Planning Institute Cymru	✓		
ShareAction		✓	



Snowdonia National Park Authority		✓	
Solva Care		✓	
South Wales Fire and Rescue Service		✓	
Sport Wales	✓	✓	
Sustrans	✓		✓
Swansea Bay University Health Board	✓	✓	
Swansea Council		✓	
Swansea Public Services Board	✓	✓	
Torfaen County Borough Council		✓	
Transport for Wales		✓	
Vattenfall Wind Power		✓	
Velindre University NHS Trust	✓	✓	✓
Wales Council for Voluntary Action		✓	
Wales Environment Link	✓		
Wales Low/Zero Carbon Hub	✓		
Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust	✓		
Welsh Government			✓
Welsh NHS Confederation	✓	✓	
Welsh Women's Aid		✓	
Women's Equality Network Cymru	✓		
World Wide Fund for Nature Cymru	✓	✓	✓
Wrexham County Borough Council		✓	