

## **An overview of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the role the Act plays in shaping Wales' response to the Coronavirus pandemic**

### **Introduction**

This briefing provides a summary of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the role the Act plays in shaping Wales' response to the Coronavirus pandemic.

In 2015 the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act was passed by the National Assembly for Wales (now the Welsh Parliament). As a result of the Act, public bodies in Wales, including the NHS and Local Government, need to consider the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other to prevent persistent inequalities such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act places an obligation on public bodies to improve social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being, which is even more vital now following the coronavirus outbreak.

Since the Act was introduced in 2015, NHS organisations in Wales, the Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts, have been working to deliver innovative care models which help to create long-lasting and positive change for current and future generations. The Act puts in place seven well-being goals, and the NHS is maximising their contributions to all seven goals as highlighted in our briefing, [the journey towards implementing the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in Wales](#).

While the NHS in Wales, like the rest of the UK, have to deliver against a backdrop of significant pressure on their emergency departments and also primary and community care services, this increase in demand means that the NHS needs to adapt and focus on innovative models of care, working across the public sector to ensure our communities are brought closer together, with early interventions and prevention at the heart of what we do.

Across the UK the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed deep structural inequalities in our economy and society, including wage poverty, health inequalities, racial disparities, food poverty, job insecurity and imbalances in quality of housing. We risk exacerbating all of these challenges if we go back to the way things were.

At the beginning of the pandemic the Future Generations Commissioner stated that while the pandemic has brought incredible challenges, *“how we recover gives us a once-in-a-generation opportunity”* and there must be a change in direction to *“reset our economy and remedy past failures with bold, collaborative, inclusive thinking and political courage. It needs to address health, the economy and the ongoing climate and nature crises for the sake of Wales' long-term future. We need a new definition of prosperity, based on well-being, and a fairer, greener way of living”*. The Commissioner has highlighted that the Welsh Government decisions in response to the pandemic must work to understand the impact on children and young people and must meet today's needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. There is now the opportunity to be bold, collaborative, inclusive in our thinking to think about how we will both address the short-term recovery and longer-

term challenges, such as climate change, tackling inequalities and the economic downturn.

### What is the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act') is about improving the recognised four dimensions of well-being in Wales - social, economic, environmental and cultural. The Act is aimed at public bodies and institutions and seeks to ensure that decisions taken today are not at the expense of future generations' well-being.

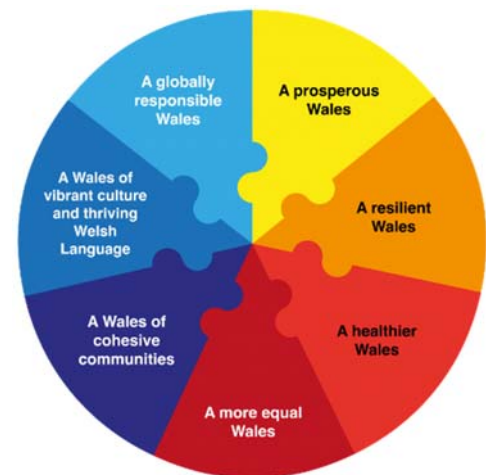
To date, Wales remains the only country in the world to impose statutory duties on public bodies to protect the needs of future generations and to embed the United Nations Sustainable Development goals into law. Crucially, the Act emphasises that all four dimensions of well-being are as important as each other, which establishes the foundations for partnership working and cross-sector collaboration.

### The vision of the Act and structures for achieving it

The Act's vision is encapsulated in the seven well-being goals. The Act clearly sets out what these goals are to ensure that public bodies work together when achieving them. They also enable public bodies to check whether their existing practices and processes adhere to these goals.

These goals are as follows:

- A prosperous Wales.
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales.
- A Wales of cohesive communities.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
- A globally responsible Wales.



Alongside the seven well-being goals, the Act establishes a '*sustainable development principle*'. The principle is designed to support organisations to meet their duties under the Act. Doing something "*in accordance with the sustainable development principle*" means "*that the body must act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*".

Guidance on the Act makes it clear that public bodies will need to show five '*ways of working*' that, taken collectively, will ensure the sustainable development principle is upheld. These five ways of working are:

- **The long-term:** The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
- **Prevention:** How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives.

- **Integration:** Considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies.
- **Collaboration:** Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.
- **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.

### Remit

The Act applies to 44 public bodies in Wales, including the Welsh Government and Welsh Ministers who must consider the Act when making policy and budgetary decisions. It also applies to the seven Local Health Boards in Wales and two national NHS Trusts, Public Health Wales NHS Trust and Velindre NHS Trust. While the Act does not apply to the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust, the Trust is committed to working within the spirit of the Act and have adopted the sustainable development principles to improve the way they work.

All public bodies in Wales are required to publish well-being objectives. In setting and delivering on these objectives, the organisation will need to demonstrate how it is achieving the well-being goals as defined by the Act.

The Act also established 22 Public Services Boards (PSBs), one for each Local Authority area in Wales, to improve joint working across all public services in each Local Authority area. The Members of each Public Services Board must include: the Local Authority; the Local Health Board; Fire and Rescue Authority; Natural Resources Wales. In addition, the following are invited to participate: Welsh ministers; Chief Constables; Police and Crime Commissioner; relevant Probation Services; and at least one body representing voluntary organisations.

### Well-being statement

Public bodies must publish a statement when setting their well-being objectives that sets out why they feel the objective will help the organisation to achieve the well-being goals. This statement is known as a well-being statement. The statement must also set out how the organisation will apply the sustainable development principle. Finally, public bodies are required to produce an annual report that shows the progress the organisation has made on achieving the well-being objectives.

### The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

The Act created the post of [Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#). In practice, this means acting as a guardian for future generations in Wales by supporting public bodies to deliver on their obligations under the legislation and start thinking about what processes are being put in place to safeguard future generations from adverse impacts. The role is currently held by Sophie Howe.

The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales has a range of actions they can carry out:

- **Advise, encourage and promote:** The Commissioner can provide advice to public bodies and Public Services Boards, and promote and encourage them to work to meet their well-being objectives.
- **Research:** The Commissioner may carry out research including into the well-being goals, the national indicators and milestones, and the sustainable development principle and how public bodies apply it.
- **Carry out reviews:** The Commissioner may conduct a review into how public bodies are taking account of the long-term impact of their decisions and make recommendations based on the findings.
- **Make recommendations:** The Commissioner can make recommendations to a public body about the steps it has taken or proposes to take and then meet its well-being objectives. Public bodies must take all reasonable steps to follow the recommendations made by the Commissioner.
- **Produce Future Generations reports:** The Commissioner must publish, a year before a Senedd (Welsh Parliament) election, a report containing the Commissioner's assessment of the improvements public bodies should make to achieve the well-being goals. The next Senedd election is set to take place in May 2021 and the Commissioner recently published the first of these [reports](#).
- **Work with the Advisory Panel to guide decision-making:** The Commissioner is supported by an Advisory Panel. The Panel includes other Wales Commissioners (such as the Older Person's Commissioner and the Children's Commissioner); the Chief Medical Officer for Wales; a representative from Natural Resources Wales, Wales Trades Union Congress (TUC) and Welsh business. The Commissioner may invite others to attend and Welsh Ministers can appoint new members.

## COVID-19

In response to COVID-19 the Commissioner has welcomed the support that the Welsh Government is providing for businesses, care homes and the voluntary sector and their immediate needs, however she also clearly flagged the need to explore opportunities for doing things differently, and take a more long-term approach as we move from the crisis into recovery towards a better Wales post COVID-19.

In response to the Welsh Government's first Supplementary Budget on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, the Commissioner [stated](#) *"The Welsh Government should further explore how it is maximising the opportunities presented by the crisis, using the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the public appetite for change. We're not going back to business as usual and we need to see a commitment to an improved way of life, supported by a well-being economy approach to all financial decisions, including funding the climate and nature emergency declared last year"*.

The Commissioner has clearly stated that she will be *"challenging the Government to ensure that we are embracing the opportunities to rebuild a better Wales – putting the needs of current and future generations at the heart of decision making"* and that future funding and Welsh Government budgets should invest in the following areas:

1. Develop an economic stimulus package that leads to job creation and supports the decarbonisation of homes, through building new low carbon affordable housing and investing in a national programme to improve the energy efficiency of existing homes.

2. Invest in better ways to connect and move people through improving digital connectivity, active travel and public transport.
3. Invest in skills and training to support the transition to a better future, creating new greener jobs.
4. Invest in nature and prioritise funding and support for large-scale habitat and wildlife restoration, creation and connectivity throughout Wales –including for natural flood defences, to implement the new national forest, and to ensure land use management and agriculture supports secure local food chains and distribution.
5. Invest in the industries and technologies of the future, and support for businesses that will help Wales to lead the low carbon revolution and lock wealth and jobs into local areas with investment in the foundational economy.

The Future Generations Commissioner, alongside other Commissioners in Wales (Welsh Language, Older People's and Children's) and stakeholders, including the NHS, will play a key role in shaping Wales' response to the Coronavirus pandemic. When we emerge from the pandemic, the objective must be to secure the change outlined by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and continue Wales' trajectory to achieving the vision for a happier, healthier, fairer and more equal Wales.

### Further Information

To find out more about the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, please contact [nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org](mailto:nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org) (Assistant Director, Welsh NHS Confederation) or visit the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales [website](#).

### How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further details on any of the issues raised in this briefing. Please contact **Nesta Lloyd-Jones, Assistant Director**, on [Nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org](mailto:Nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org)

The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations that make up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards, the three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

You can visit our website at [www.welshconfed.org](http://www.welshconfed.org) or follow us on Twitter  [@WelshConfed](https://twitter.com/WelshConfed)

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