

By email

3rd September 2021

Dear Mark,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations in the Public Accounts Committee report '**Delivering for Future Generations: The Story so Far**' published on the 24th March 2021.

I welcome the report's findings and recommendations which reflected my evidence, the findings of my [statutory monitoring and assessing](#) and my [Future Generations Report 2020](#).

The Well-being of Future Generations Act is the greatest cultural change programme the Welsh public sector has ever experienced and I'm proud of the work that is being done to meet its aspirations. Any cultural change takes time, but changes of the magnitude envisaged by the Act means that this is a long-term mission rather than a short-term fix. Wales is the only country to legislate in this way, using a long-term approach to look at root causes of problems via a law that's admired globally.

In terms of general progress, over the past five years, there has been a marked change in political commitment to the Act and I am starting to see public bodies change the way they deliver and design services. For example, the way transport planning is being approached; the way new schools, homes and public buildings are being designed to be more sustainable; curriculum reform, shifting beyond delivering 'services' to focusing on what matters to communities. I'm seeing politicians for example reject the status quo in addressing congestion through building more roads; instead, they are looking for solutions which are better for the well-being of people and planet.

The Act is providing a helpful tool for change makers to challenge the system. I am pleased to play a role in challenging the blockers but there remains funding challenges.

I do not currently have the resources to deal with all of the issues associated with implementing such broad cultural change and, there needs to be greater funding for capacity, leadership development and support for transformational change.

In addition to having a modest budget, given the wide remit of my role, I already flagged concern in my 2019-20 and 20-21 Statutory Estimates about how my funding level would have a negative impact on the quality and level of my support and advice to Public Bodies. Increased pension costs, and annual modest pay rises in line with Welsh Government rates eat into my year on year flat lined funding.

Flat line underfunding means in real terms I can do less while expectations and demands for support and advice across 44 public bodies grows (who both I and the Auditor General for Wales have found are not

resourced themselves to support the cultural change required by the Act). The level of support and advice offered to Public Bodies and Ministers increases year on year. Requests for support and advice were up by 44% in 2019-20 from 2018-19.

Furthermore, this demand for statutory services looks set to increase: The most recent regulatory impact assessment (RIA) relating to the establishment of Corporate Joint Committees (CJCs) within the Local Government and Elections Bill specifies that costs to my office are nil despite me providing detailed costings to officials.

I will come back to the importance of this, in relation to the implementation of the recommendations below.

'**Delivering for Future Generations: The Story so Far**' report and its recommendations build on the concerns and advice I highlighted in my [Future Generations Report 2020](#) about the systemic barriers to progress which need to be addressed.

My reflections below directly respond to the following recommendations made by the Committee:

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.

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

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.

My response to: 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.

During my time as Commissioner, I have worked closely with public bodies across Wales, providing advice, guidance, and support to them in their application of the Well-being of Future Generations Act. I was pleased that many public bodies and the Committee recognised that this support was useful. However, this finding reflects the reality of the impossible challenge of supporting 44 public bodies across all policy areas whilst also ensuring that new policy legislation and guidance which comes from Welsh Government does not undermine the Act and the ability of other public bodies to implement it. My office cannot meet these

demands for all public bodies as we have not been adequately resourced. It therefore does not surprise that those we have been able to help find that support valuable and others want more of our time.

“Sport Wales has found the support, resources and advice from the team to be invaluable. How this is made available consistently for all public bodies is a challenge.” (Sport Wales)

“Our relationship with the Commissioner’s office is excellent. I think they’re hugely knowledgeable, very enthusiastic, supportive, and similar for Wales Audit Office, not just on the Act, but on our broader business where they’re able to actually give us a view on how we’re doing, how we’re spending public money, but more importantly, pointing us to good practice and other areas we may wish to explore.” (Velindre NHS Trust)

“We had a lot of involvement with FGCW and had lots of practical support... The support we have had from FGCW has been very useful. They were willing to travel up to North Wales to give us additional information, presentations, support on how to embed the tools. I think that’s seen as a very supportive offer for all authorities across North Wales.” (Cyngor Ynys Mon/Anglesey Council)

“We have used the Commissioner’s tools, resources and information to make resources available across the organisation... Support and input from Commissioner very, very helpful.” (Aneurin Bevan University Health Board)

This ongoing relationship with public bodies is further captured in the requests for support my office receives. Since May 2018, I have received 892 requests for support, 319 of which (~36%) came from public bodies. Of these, 136 (~43% of all public body requests) are from Welsh Government. Requests for support and advice to my office were up by 78% in 2019-20 from 2018-19. This fell by ~19% between 2019-20 and 2020-21 which was likely due to the pandemic. Since this financial year began in April 2021, I have had 128 requests, which is likely to grow as we work more closely with public bodies as per the Committee’s recommendations.

However, I recognise that due to limited resources and, more recently, the pressures placed on public bodies during the pandemic, building on this support has been challenging. In previous years I have used a combination of the underspend from my year one budget (resulting largely from the delay in recruiting staff to my office) and other income to fund a level of services over and above my annual grant in aid funding level and this won’t be available from March 2022.

I too believe that Welsh Government play a critical role in the success of the large-scale cultural change programme driven by the legislation, not just because they are a major public body covered by the Act themselves, but because whether or not they demonstrate the principles of the Act has a significant impact on what other public bodies do. This has meant that my focus in the early years of my role has been on ensuring Welsh Government have the right policy, processes and levers in place.

In their evidence to the Committee, public bodies recognised the importance of this:

- 50% of public bodies highlighted that the number of strategic partnerships, and having multiple memberships, is a barrier to implementing the Act.
- 56% of public bodies highlighted that short-term funding cycles and finance restrictions etc impede their ability to deliver long-term preventative actions.
- 67% of public bodies suggested that greater cross-policy and strategy alignment is required from Welsh Government.
- 30% of all responses suggest stronger leadership is required from Welsh Government.
- 42% of public bodies suggested that Welsh Government need to better embed and embody principles of the Act as a role model for other public bodies.

These concerns echoed the findings within my Future Generations Report.

A Dedicated Point of Contact

The Committee heard from several public bodies that they wished to have more contact with my office. Having a point of contact within my team is something public bodies have consistently told me would help with implementing the legislation, but this has been challenging due to my resource-level and the need to focus on systemic issues.

Public bodies echoed this in evidence to this Committee:

- 36% of PAC respondents would like additional support, particularly around how to deliver the Act.
- 38% of PAC respondents would like additional training and or resources for their organisation and for public purposes.
- 22% of public bodies raised that closer working relationships with the FGC such as having a direct office contact would be beneficial.

“...what I want more from the Commissioner’s office: I want more time. I think they’re excellent. There are too few of them, and they’re trying to do an awful lot with a very small resource... Excellent relationship would like more of the Commissioner’s team’s time. Excellent but finite resource.” (Velindre NHS Trust)

“...I don’t know what the Commissioner’s resources are but certainly having a direct contact (would be helpful), if she had the resources.” (Powys County Council)

“Having a rep from the Commissioner’s office in every region to give us access to them. More convenient for them to be present in every region (not county because they don’t have enough staff).” (Cyngor Ynys Mon / Angelsey Council)

In listening to this feedback, I am pleased to say I have allocated a member of my team to be a dedicated point of contact for each public body covered by the Act with the intention of deepening our relationship and providing support that is consistent with my current funding allocation.

I have recruited four temporary staff members to trial this approach and involve public bodies in regular conversations over the next few months in order to gauge our resource and capacity to respond to requests for help. The intention is to build more consistent and constructive relationships together, giving us additional opportunities to improve communication, provide advice and support, showcase good practice and help signpost to other colleagues internally and across Wales.

Already, public bodies have told me that they welcome this approach.

“[We] welcome the Future Generations Commissioner decision to support Health Board implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act through the allocation of a dedicated point of contact within the Future Generations team.” (Letter from a Health Board, July 2021)

“This is a welcome initiative to have that point of contact with the Commissioner and the Commissioner’s office.” (Meeting with a local council leader, July 2021)

“I am definitely in support of this initiative, before this we didn’t have too much interaction with the Office and now it feels like we have a two-way conversation” (Meeting with Cabinet Member for Future Generations and Well-being at a local council, August 2021)

This work has been funded by the last of my historical underspend and reserves which won’t be available from March 2022. **The extra members of my team I have recruited to work in this pilot are sadly on short-term contracts as I will need extra funding at the end of this financial year above the annual grant I have traditionally received.** I am making a case to Welsh Government for this purpose as we are moving to a needs-based budget going forward in my statutory estimates for 2022/23, as I would like to establish this work on a permanent basis.

This 6-month pilot will be reviewed later this year, and I will share an update with the Committee in the New Year.

Additional Support

I am also planning additional support for public bodies through the second edition of the **Future Generations Leadership Academy (FGLA) where in particular senior leaders across the public sector will be able to access reverse mentoring from a future leader and opportunities to test policy development with the Academy.** This programme is fully funded by partner organisations across the public, private and third sector

and following a pilot year in 2019-20 an independent evaluation found the FGLA achieved its objectives to train young people (including young leaders from public bodies) in leadership skills and build their understanding of the Well-being for Future Generations Act and how to achieve its goals. The second FGLA programme will run from November 2021 to June 2022 and we are recruiting 20-30 young leaders from across the public, private and voluntary sector, between the ages of 18-30. You can find more information about the Academy [here](#).

I have also published '**bite-sized**' versions of the **Future Generations Report**, which are tailored at specific sectors and departments in public bodies. The aim of these products is to provide public bodies with alternative versions of the Future Generations Report 2020 which are easier to digest. My team has been running sessions with different sectoral bodies for example North Wales Planning Officers Group (NWPOG) and Young Planners Cymru to upskill them on using these resources. You can find these resources [here](#).

"We really like the simple, attractive, user-friendly format of the document. We think that the Stats and Trends lays out very clearly what the problems are and gives equal weight to the joint crises of global warming and biodiversity loss. The Oxfam donut model demonstrates how we in Wales are living beyond our fair share of the world's resources. We welcome the steer that the document provides as a very clear vision of what Wales should be aiming for." (A National Public Body Feedback)

"This is good – I like this. A great way to illustrate and explain the role and importance of housing in regards to the opportunities and the wider benefits etc. A really helpful way of presenting the link between Housing and Future Generations – particularly for lay people." (A Local Authority Feedback)

In order to support public bodies to apply the Act, and to recognise what good looks like, I have published **case studies** which demonstrate transformational change. I will work with public bodies to identify good practice and scale up learning across their organisations. This is in response to the 31% of responses to the Committee's inquiry that suggested that sharing good practice will inspire and promote further activity. You can find these case studies [here](#).

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

In addition to the comments on Recommendation 3 above, I would like to share the following reflections.

Public Services Boards (PSBs)

It's an important time for PSBs. Between autumn 2021 and spring 2023, they will publish their second well-being assessments and well-being plans for their respective areas, as required by the Act.

In an effort to be as helpful as possible in supporting PSBs to prepare these, my office worked closely with colleagues in Welsh Government's Partnership division to share a clear set of joint expectations in March 2021. This was signed by both Julie James MS and myself, and is included in the appendix for your reference.

This guidance not only sets out what we expected to see during the second round of well-being planning from PSBs, but also what my office and Welsh Government will do (and what we will explore), to support PSBs as best we can.

For example, we said we will continue to collaboratively run the national PSB network meetings and topic focused webinars through 2021 with other organisations and networks, building on the 'involvement' and 'futures/long-term' events we held in November and December 2020. And we said we'd explore the potential for small, online communities of PSB practice (peer networks) on particular themes. My team are also working collaboratively with Co-Production Network Wales who have secured Big Lottery funding to support the involvement of people across Wales in well-being assessments and planning.

My office continues to work with Welsh Government colleagues to actively run and participate in the PSB Coordinator network meetings, held 3-4 times a year. Due to the pandemic, these switched from meeting in person in locations across Wales, to online. And it's been positive to see the energy and active participation from the Coordinators in these more recent online sessions. We're also using the network meetings, quarterly bulletins, online webinars and other means to share good/best practice with PSBs - this is particularly powerful when hearing from PSBs who feel they're delivering aspects of the Acts well in their areas.

My office continues to work closely with the Sustainable Futures Division of Welsh Government, who are leading on the publication of the second Future Trends Report. This is to ensure alignment and integration with the PSBs as it develops. Currently, this includes my office working collaboratively with Welsh Government, Public Health Wales and Natural Resources Wales to prepare clearer steps and guidance to PSBs on how they can embed futures and long-term into their well-being assessments and plans. And, participating in a series of online workshops in the autumn with Government colleagues to help PSBs understand and apply the Future Trends Report to their areas, helping them answer the 'so what?' question.

This dedicated work is in addition to my general duties of providing advice, assistance and encouraging public bodies and PSBs to take greater account of the long-term impact of the things they do. For PSBs specifically, my team regularly provide ad-hoc advice, digest their Annual Reports and provide case studies and share good practice and I sometimes attend PSB meetings to provide advice and encouragement. As explained above, the points of contact within my team are currently involving representatives of public bodies and PSBs across Wales to explore how my limited resources and capacity can be best used to help them implement this legislation and cultural change.

My response to: 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.

As Welsh Government, the Senedd and public bodies develop their plans for recovery from the COVID pandemic and deal with ongoing challenges, the long-term and integrated focus of the Well-being of Future Generations Act has never been more essential. We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create public services that tackle the economic, equality, health, climate and nature crises simultaneously, and which provides the 'Wales We Want' for our communities now and in the future.

COVID-19 has placed huge pressure on the public sector and has resulted in devastating loss of life. The Committee have heard many examples of how public bodies have used this period as an opportunity to see things differently. However, I have not yet been assured that futures-thinking and foresight planning has or is being fully applied to help shape Welsh Government's long-term response to the pandemic, or in how it seeks to prevent future crises from occurring.

Furthermore, COVID-19 has highlighted or exacerbated many inequalities that were already there and can no longer be ignored. I advise public bodies to take all reasonable steps to identify and address these challenges. My forthcoming Inequality in a Future Wales Report will also provide public bodies with further information to consider.

To ensure Welsh Government were considering the Well-being of Future Generations Act in its recovery plans I issued several pieces of advice, including a [5 point plan](#), a detailed letter to Jeremy Miles MS and Rebecca Evans MS (as attached) and published a [Fit for the Future Programme for Government](#). I have followed this up with more detailed advice on specific aspect for example investing in the decarbonisation of homes, the new nation Transport Strategy and on the development of skills policy.

I welcomed the comments made by public bodies during the inquiry. Over a third of written PAC responses highlight that COVID (and Brexit) should be used as opportunities for implementing the Act while people are receptive to change. There are clear lessons here for how these ways of working can be 'baked in' for future work and applied to long-term thinking, not just crisis response.

"The Act emerging from COVID is more important than ever before. The goals are core principles for every country throughout the world. We've learnt a lot of lessons and that's the country we want coming out of the pandemic. The way to do it is to work together. The 5 Ways of Working are more important than ever post-COVID" (Cyngor Ynys Mon / Anglesey Council)

"The experience of COVID and the ACT have planted a conscience in us of a higher purpose and making our services more accessible." (National Library of Wales)

Rather than spending £3m on a new centre, the National Library of Wales chose to invest in digital to make their collections more accessible.

Flintshire Council recognized that budget restrictions and COVID has helped them look at things differently. They've refurbished the old buildings for some day centres and commissioned a third sector organisation who are running the service far better- the offer to service users has far improved.

I have welcomed the innovation and collaboration by public bodies in addressing the COVID response. Activities and decisions that once were seen as challenging or not essential have been actioned and I'm pleased that public bodies have committed to continuing many of these good approaches beyond the recovery.

In my evidence to the Committee, I shared concerns that Welsh Government were failing to apply all five ways of working consistently during the pandemic. These concerns included:

- Lack of join-up and **integration** on Wales' COVID-19 recovery. I was concerned that several policy groups and Ministerial Advisory Groups were potentially working in isolation.
- A lack of alignment between the activity on equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to the response to COVID-19 and the ministerial advisory groups (and others) focused on recovery. It is not clear how the information and intelligence being gathered is informing the work (and investment decisions) of Government to address **preventative** action.
- A lack of **involvement** (in terms of diversity and equality) in many of the groups shaping the recovery. There is a need to build on involvement methods used as part of the crisis response, broadening the involvement of groups steering the recovery.
- The absence of **integration** across policy areas. For example, the National Museum have been open in their message that they are an 'underused resource'. They want to be better connected to the other groups and networks working on COVID-19 recovery, particularly groups focused on the environment, skills and health and well-being.
- Unclear how **long-term** thinking, futures and foresight is being applied.

These lessons must be shared across Government and externally.

Welsh Government showed a progressive approach in passing this law – but has underestimated the scale of focus, support and reform needed to get it delivered in every layer of governance and public service delivery in Wales. The Government now needs to ensure that the ambitious approach in passing legislation on the floor of the Senedd is matched with ambitious action on implementing it on the ground.

I look forward to working with this Committee and others across the Senedd during remainder of my term.

Kind regards,



Sophie Howe
Future Generations Commissioner for Wales