

Via email

22<sup>nd</sup> of August 2024

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your letter on the 24<sup>th</sup> June requesting my view on the progress made by Welsh Government since the Section 20 review was carried out by my predecessor in 2022. I am happy to build on the response I provided to the Equality and Social Justice Committee on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024. For this purpose, I have also shared this letter with Jenny Rathbone.

As you are aware the Continuous Learning and Improvement Plan (CLIP) was informed by the recommendation made in the Section 20 review report. The Report's findings can be found in the Annexe of this letter.

Ensuring that public bodies continually identify areas for improvement and assess their progress is a fundamental principle for wider implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (WFG) Act and the adoption of the sustainable development principle. The Maturity Matrix that we produced during the review, and have since developed into an interactive web-based tool (Ways of Working Journey Checker), is a useful for public bodies and others to identify the steps they should take to improve their use of the five ways of working. I have requested that all public bodies complete this tool and return their findings to me by the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2024.

I am grateful to the collaborative approach taken by officials and my team to ensure we are regularly updated on progress.

### **Analysis**

I am confident that good progress has been achieved in producing and delivering the CLIP. I am pleased that our Maturity Matrix produced by my office in response to the Section 20 review has been used to identify the areas of improvement.

It is clear from the update that some actions are well underway, but several actions are still in their infancy (including 2.9, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 4.9), of which I am unable to provide a full analysis.

Please see an overview of my analysis below.

### **6.6 Developing a fresh prototype for the role of Board Champion**

I particularly welcome the new approach to appointing Future Generations Champions to the Welsh Government Board, to ensure meaningful accountability, scrutiny and diversity. Drawing on the Future Generations Leadership Academy participants as rotating members of the Board is an innovative approach, and I would encourage other such public bodies to consider adopting this.

### **6.8 We will undertake a formative evaluation of our business information reporting system (BIRT) to evaluate user experience and effectiveness since its introduction**

I welcome the various steps taken to improve the effectiveness of BIRT and eagerly await the outcome of changes made in January 2025.

### **1.5 We will consider ways to improve awareness of the well-being objectives of public bodies across Wales, drawing on the monitoring work of the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales**

Working in partnership with Welsh Government to improve awareness of the well-being objectives of public bodies across Wales is a continued priority. My office continues to provide ongoing support to public bodies – including the new bodies which have been added to the legislation in the past month. We are now in early discussions on how best to produce a more public, user-friendly platform to share well-being objectives and steps. An analysis of progress made against well-being objectives will be included in the Future Generations Report 2025.

### **1.3 We will continue to engage with our international networks to share and learn from other governments across the world – this will focus on our membership of Regions4 and the Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo)**

I also welcome the continued efforts highlighted in the CLIP to engage with international networks to share and learn from other governments across the world. As the United Nations builds momentum to embed a Declaration on Future Generations and appoint a Special Envoy for Future Generations later this year – Wales' leadership on this agenda is to be welcomed.

**4.5 We will continue to work with the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales' office who leads on the futures and foresight agenda in Wales, in order to upskill and develop capacity and capability in decision making in Wales using futures**

The Plan's focus and energy to strengthen long-term thinking in the policy profession is also encouraging. As one of the ways of working in the legislation, and core to the ambitions of the WFG Act – we believe this is an area of progress that will have great impact if well-resourced and supported, as this will enable the culture change required. There are various activities in early infancy (including making wider use of the Future Trends Report and how it can be used by public bodies) by both parties which will bolster these efforts across Government and beyond, through the establishment of an informal Futures Group. We look forward to updating the Committee on these developments.

**2.1 We will introduce development pathways for policy makers to mature and enhance their skills, knowledge and behaviours in applying the sustainable development principle**

**2.2 We will update the support for policy makers through formal and informal activities, including a series of focused exercises on each of the 5 ways of working in the sustainable development principle**

I am encouraged by the efforts taken to support policy makers with application of the five ways of working through the development of a Policy Capability Strategy and Policy Capability Framework. I would advise Welsh Government to publish these resources to support the wider public sector.

**Areas for improvement**

When Welsh Government produced their Continuous Learning and Improvement Plan, my office provided feedback and produced a heat map to demonstrate how well the Areas for Improvement highlighted in the Section 20 review report were reflected in CLIP. Of the 22 Areas for Improvement in the report, we believed 9 were fully reflected, 10 were partially reflected and 3 were not reflected.

The three we believed were not reflected:

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

- Ensure that there is a safe environment to try innovations that may sometimes fail but can be used as learning opportunities for the future.
- Ask more searching questions in the People Survey.

Keeping the content of the CLIP under review is important, and I would encourage Welsh Government to regularly identify opportunities to do this.

### **5.2 We will improve accessibility to the behaviour change manual, by designing a starter pack and seeking feedback on these both internally and externally**

I recognise the capacity constraints within Welsh Government to complete all actions and appreciate that a targeted approach is necessary. However, I would invite Welsh Government to publish an annexed timeline as this will help with accountability and communication. For example, several actions (including 5.2, 5.4, 4.9) note that prototypes, tests or pilots are in place but no specific clarity on wider roll out.

### **2.3 We will continue to review and update our approach to assessing the impact of policy in an integrated way, supported by our Integrated Impact Assessment approach**

The Section 20 review highlighted some concerns relating to the Integrated Impact Assessments (IIA). The CLIP update does highlight the various actions taken and I am pleased that Welsh Government have taken action to establish a community of practice (which members from my team collaborate on with Welsh Government) to improve IIA practice, but I would encourage Welsh Government not to lose the momentum built in their own application of IIAs and assessment of policy impact. The IIAs were highlighted by Government as a key implementation mechanism for the Act, it is vital to ensure these are used effectively.

### **4.3 We will provide more in-depth insight on well-being through themed 'Wellbeing of Wales' reports, building on the 2022 report on children and young people's well-being**

I am keen for Government to consider how it can amplify the use of the Well-being of Wales Report and other resources (including research) more widely across the public sector. I have already met with officials to discuss this. As a repository of knowledge and research, I am keen to see how the CLIP can be used to encourage wider policy exchanges across government and wider public sector.



## **2.10 We will annually publish the 'Budget Improvement Plan' to show progress over the last 12 months, alongside our short and medium-term ambitions over a 5-year rolling period**

The Committee is aware that my predecessor and I have proactively and consistently called on Welsh Government to improve the way it demonstrates how it has considered the WFG Act. This is an action I still believe requires attention, namely in its budgetary processes and the need to invest more into prevention. I have met with the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and her officials to reiterate my concerns. It is of utmost importance that budgetary decisions take into account the impact of cuts and investment on the ability of other public bodies to meet their well-being objectives and steps.

## **5.3 People Survey and other internal staff surveys will continue to be used to gather insight on embedding the 5 ways of working in our organisation's culture**

CLIP also identifies a 'slight decline in staff views on the application of some of these behaviours. We know from experience that we need to increase our application of the Act in difficult circumstances and are working to ensure that staff across the whole organisation are supported to deepen their understanding and application of the Act, whatever their responsibilities.' I look forward to receiving further information on actions being taken.

## **2.5 We will continue to embed the Act in our broader organisation-wide internal capability plan and Learning and Development programme**

## **2.6 We will raise awareness of the Act with corporate teams through a tailored approach reflecting their respective roles**

The Section 20 review highlighted a need to ensure formal and informal learning and development opportunities were better produced, connected and shared. The CLIP updates (2.5 and 2.6) provide some assurance that this is being addressed, including development of new resources. The review highlighted a need to clarify the level of awareness and understanding of the Act according to job role and profession. It is unclear if this is widely understood across the organisation. Furthermore, it is essential that any learning and development opportunities go beyond awareness and seek to accelerate implementation and monitoring.

In addition to the areas for improvement I believe were not addressed in the CLIP (highlighted above) I would also like to highlight that the Section 20 review also encouraged further work should be taken to strengthen Ministerial Advice in regards of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

As the implementation of this plan continues, we hope to see how Government is seeking to share this approach with other public bodies, as we strongly believe that there are learnings that sit beyond Government that could be adopted. The highlighted Stakeholder Forum and the Knowledge Exchange events could provide such opportunities.

All actions in the CLIP are necessary to ensure the implementation of the WFG Act is meaningful and effective – demonstrating the Welsh Government's leadership role. We would encourage Ministers and officials to ensure the Sustainable Futures Division have the appropriate resources to ensure delivery.

Thank you,



Derek Walker

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

## **Annexe – Section 20 Findings**

### **People and Culture**

1. There is a sense of pride and enthusiasm in this world-leading legislation, but there is some discrepancy between the level of enthusiasm and commitment and a detailed understanding of application.
2. There is a plethora of learning materials around the Act – while some material is good, the Government should seek to better understand what works and build on innovative approaches being adopted in some parts of Government.
3. There are concerted efforts to embed long-term thinking across government, but the need to respond to multiple crises and capacity are often seen as barriers to civil servants fully applying this way of working.

### **Process**

4. The WFG Act is driving changes in the ways policies are being developed, designed and implemented but it is not yet being consistently applied in a way which embeds all aspects of the Act, or across the whole organisation.
5. There are a range of accountability mechanisms to provide Ministers and senior colleagues that the WFG Act is being embedded and implemented in how the Government works, but they are not all utilised effectively.

### **Public Sector Leadership**

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