
Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Y Pwyllgor Cydraddoldeb a Chyfiawnder Cymdeithasol | Equality and Social Justice Committee

Ymateb gan: Ymddiriedolaeth GIG Gwasanaethau Ambiwylans Cymru |
Evidence from: Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Equalities and Social Justice Committee

Post-legislative Review of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015

Evidence Submission: Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust

Introduction

1. The Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust (WAST) welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Senedd's Equalities and Social Justice Committee in respect of its post-legislative review of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015.
2. As Committee will know, WAST was one of eight new organisations to come under the auspices of the Act on June 30, 2024 and, as such, it is early on in the Trust's WBFGA journey.
3. That said, the Trust has committed through successive iterations of its Integrated Medium Term Plan (IMTP), NHS Wales organisations' key planning documents, to work within the spirit of the Act.
4. Given this relative newness to the statutory requirements of the Act, this short evidence submission outlines some observations in respect of Committee's specific areas of inquiry, notably:
 - how far the intended objective of the Act is being achieved;
 - any action which should be taken to improve the effectiveness of the Act and its implementation, including any specific drafting issues;
 - whether the review and reporting requirements under the Act are being met;
 - the effectiveness of guidance made under the Act;
 - how far the Act has been legally binding and enforceable; and
 - how far the Act has represented, and will continue to represent, value for money.
5. However, it should be noted that, given that it is less than 12 months since the Trust has been formally subject to the Act, and that membership of public service boards (PSBs) has not been conferred on the Trust as a result (WAST is a member of the Vale of Glamorgan PSB as a result of long standing relationships), these observations are informed by WAST's experience of the partnership landscape more generally and its experience of collaboration.
6. In the interests of clarity, observations will be offered under the headings relevant to Committee's specific areas of interest.

How Far the Intended Objective of the Act is Being Achieved

7. The intended objective of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act in ensuring that the Wales of today, tomorrow and the future is one where its people can thrive is one with which it is difficult to dispute.
8. With its focus on the seven wellbeing goals and the need for public bodies to collaborate to achieve them, the Act was a progressive piece of legislation, the tenets of which are founded in progressive policy-making and a recognition of the challenges faced in post-industrial Wales. On that basis, there is little to criticise in the legislation itself.
9. However, a decade later and the impact of a marginalised economy outside the European Union trading bloc, a pandemic which has had both health, economic and societal ramifications for the Welsh population and a shift in the regard in which public bodies are held, it is clear that, despite the legislation, public bodies have an uphill battle to manage their immediate challenges.
10. These challenges make for a particularly complex partnership landscape, where competing priorities and immediate challenges can often trump longer term thinking and action, despite the very best of intentions.

Partnership Landscape: Observations and Challenges

11. It is important at the outset to state that WAST coming under the auspices of the WBFGA has not resulted in membership of the 19 public service boards in Wales, one of the main collaborative vehicles to support delivery of the Act.
12. However, the Trust has been a long-standing of the Vale of Glamorgan Public Service Board, a function of individual relationships developed over many years and is also now a member of the seven Regional Partnership Boards (linked to the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014) in Wales.
13. The Trust also has well developed relationships with the other emergency services in Wales and, as a service commissioned by the seven health boards in Wales through the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee, has a strong commitment to collaboration and partnership.
14. The observations outlined below are, therefore, borne of those experiences and of the many other touchpoints the Trust has with organisations across the Welsh public service, third sector and beyond.
15. One of the main tenets of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, and outlined in its five ways of working, is collaboration. Collaboration can be a driver in ensuring public funding is optimised in a way that enables bolder decision-making to safeguard future generations and realise the aim of long term thinking informing short and medium-term actions.
16. What is clear in the partnership and collaboration sphere is that organisations are well-intentioned and committed to change and to working together. The challenge becomes

delivering on this in a meaningful way when funding and, importantly, governance mechanisms and performance management frameworks are different.

The partnership landscape in Wales is complex and rather cluttered. A total of 10 NHS organisations (seven health boards, three trusts), 22 local authorities and a number of Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

17. Partners come together, among other mechanisms, through Public Service Boards (19) and Regional Partnership Boards (7), with the latter being the conduit currently for the Regional Integration Fund (RIF), which is due to cease in 2027.
18. In an environment where public sector funding remains, and is likely to remain, constrained, while societal demands and expectations grow, and many needs are immediate, the concept of long-term thinking and collaboration is one which is often difficult for public sector bodies to harness effectively. Couple this with short-term funding cycles, and it becomes difficult to see beyond 12-36 months out in terms of decision-making. This, in itself, often militates against the long termism which is at the heart of the Act.
19. There are a number of facets of partnership and collaborative working between agencies which are often problematic. When finances are constrained and under significant pressure, and the very time when collaboration should be a key part of service development and delivery, organisations often retrench and become more inwardly focused.
20. Collaboration requires not only shared purpose or goal, it often requires the ceding of control of resources, financial, physical or human. This is often deemed as a higher risk strategy at times of financial constraint. To collaborate effectively, there has to be a strong trust-based relationship between partners, and this takes time to develop. Often it is predicated on individual, rather than organisational relationships, and this in itself can result in unintended fractures or stalling of progress when those individuals move on.
21. Similarly, there is often over-reliance on discrete, non-core funding “pots”, for example the Regional Integrated Fund (RIF), and its predecessor the Integrated Care Fund (ICF), administered through regional partnership boards, to support collaborative and more integrated models of care between statutory partners. The RIF

Any Action Which Should be Taken to Improve the Effectiveness of the Act and its Implementation, Including any Specific Drafting Issues

22. While the substance of the Act already requires subject bodies to work collaboratively towards long-term objectives, there may be an option to enable enhanced collaboration through shared performance management frameworks.
23. Two recent reports from the Future Generations Commissioner and Audit Wales highlight well both the challenges and opportunities ahead, and also reference the relatively cluttered partnership landscape across Wales. Very different governance

structures across health, social care, local government and other public bodies mean that partnership-based decision-making is difficult. A shared performance management framework from Welsh Government, against which bodies subject to the Act were actively measured in terms of their collaboration goals, would perhaps focus more attention on the shared needs of the population, rather than the funding source for initiatives.

24. Similarly, more training on tools to enhance collaboration for Boards/Cabinets and senior leaders, for example the potential for section 33 agreements (formal partnership arrangements between NHS bodies and local authorities, primarily enabled by regulations under the National Health Service (Wales) Act 2006) to enable greater collaborative working, could reduce some of the anxiety associated with shared decision-making, accountability and financial flows.

Whether the Review and Reporting Requirements Under the Act are Being Met

25. It is difficult for the Welsh Ambulance Service to comment on this aspect, as 2025/26 will be the first year where it will be subject to reporting requirements under the Act. The organisation remains committed to complying with its obligations in this regard.

The Effectiveness of Guidance Made under the Act

26. In terms of the Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust as a new organisation to come under the auspices of the Act less than a year ago, the most recent 2024 guidance has been helpful.
27. What is clear is that in the decade the Act has been in place, genuine progress remains challenging, for all the reasons outlined earlier in this submission. The question now becomes whether guidance translates into mandated action, or whether this would simply be a step too far, given the range of targets to which public bodies in Wales are already subject.

How Far the Act Has Been Legally Binding and Enforceable

28. In line with points previously made in this submission, while it remains difficult to dispute the logic and ambition of the Act, it was developed at a time of greater stability and without the social, economic and health shocks which have been experienced since.
29. These matters do not negate the validity of the Act, nor do they mean that the Act should be repealed. However, what is clear that is difficult to exert pressure on public bodies to comply with the Act when they face a multiplicity of immediate challenges which consume the majority of their activity.

How Far the Act has Represented, and Will Continue to Represent, Value for Money

30. Given that there are no funding streams for public bodies associated with the Act, and

that funding for the Future Generations Commissioner and his team is relatively limited in the scope of Welsh Government budgets, costs of implementing the Act are modest. As a Trust, no members of staff are employed specifically to implement the Act, and this is likely to be similar across public bodies. Arguably, this is both a strength and a weakness, as capacity to deliver is often cited as a constraint.

31. The Act is a unique piece of legislation that has been widely admired globally. It has intrinsic social value, which is difficult to evaluate on a value for money basis.

Welsh Ambulance Service: WBFGA Journey

32. The Welsh Ambulance Service has recently published its wellbeing objectives, which can be found [here](#). This year, the Trust will focus on embedding these objectives as a frame of reference for its decision-making. The Trust Board is committed to this process, and it will be important to remain focused when short-term exigencies can often trump longer-term goals.
33. The Trust's long-term horizon is already reflected in the organisation's move towards an updated model of clinical service delivery, designed to ensure that it is fit for the long-term, meets the needs of the people of Wales and is delivered collaboratively with the wider NHS Wales system and other partners. Similarly, the Trust will be looking at its approach to adaptation planning, examining how, as a statutory body under the WBFGA, it responds to known challenges, e.g. climate change. The Trust will be evaluating its current position against a maturity matrix to understand better the work it will need to do to work fully in the spirit of, and compliance with, the Act.

Closing Remarks

34. It is hoped that this evidence submission is helpful to Committee and the Trust looks forward to receiving the outcome of Committee's review in due course.

Ends/EVH/June25