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**Welsh Parliament**

**Equality and Social Justice Committee**

**Inquiry:** Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

**Evidence from:** Wales Council for Voluntary Action





# Well-being of Future Generations Act: Post- legislative scrutiny

## A RESPONSE FROM WCVA

- 1) Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Wales. Our purpose is to enable voluntary organisations to make a bigger difference together.
- 2) We thank the Committee for the opportunity to respond to this consultation on post-legislative scrutiny of the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

## INTRODUCTION

- 3) From the work of unpaid carers, through sports clubs, social prescribers, community centres and mental health groups, to advocacy organisations the voluntary sector and volunteers in Wales play a crucial role in Wales' well-being.
- 4) Therefore, for the Future Generations Act's Well-being Goals to be realised, it is vital the voluntary sector is at the centre of all.

conversations and decisions regarding the Act. It must be at the table for early and continuous dialogue on national policy-building and with public bodies about services that deliver the Act's goals. WCVA champions the Act but regrets it hasn't delivered transformational change in its first decade.

- 5) Carrying on with no substantial changes risks the Act failing in its objectives. Consideration must also be given to better enforcement to ensure the Act is properly implemented and achieving its Goals.
- 6) WCVA's engagement shows the voluntary sector feels it is still not on an equal footing with statutory bodies in discussions about the implementation of the Act. This is despite our sector's unique position which allows us to be more nimble and better able to engage with communities and individuals than public bodies. Failure to trust and value the voluntary sector means we struggle to amplify the voices of those at the grassroots level. In turn, communities who would benefit the most from realisation of the Goals of the Act lack input into decisions made in regards to its implementation. This erodes trust and undermines the intentions of the Act.
- 7) The voluntary sector has a strong relationship with the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner through WCVA's facilitation. Since the Act's launch, voluntary organisations have been eager to work with statutory partners to help achieve the Well-being Goals. We feel there is a need for systematic reform, including appropriate funding, to further this objective. We are keen to work with Welsh Government to shape its responses to the recommendations in the [Future Generations Report 2025](#).

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8) A summary of our recommendations relating to the Act follows.  
More detail is offered further on in this response.

### Effectiveness of the Act

- A pivot towards preventative work is crucial in the aim of creating A Healthier Wales, as well as reducing pressure on acute services. It must be prioritised. However, the voluntary sector will require sustainable and consistent resourcing for it to play its full part in the preventative agenda.
- There is a clear need to provide a more prescriptive framework for public bodies to contribute towards A Wales of Cohesive Communities. A co-produced communities policy would be the essential first step.
- As per the recommendation of the recent report from the Future Generations Commissioner, all public bodies should put organisational volunteering strategies in place.
- While the current milestone for volunteering under the Act has been reached, efforts must now focus on maintaining and exceeding this milestone. Full implementation of the New Approach to Volunteering in Wales will be essential to supporting this goal.

## Clearer guidance

- There should be clear guidance on how money earmarked for prevention is spent to ensure it is in keeping with the Goals of the Act.
- Public bodies should receive guidance to adhere to the [Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector](#) to ensure voluntary sector partners can play their part in helping them deliver on the Goals of the Act.
- When the Act is successful and National Milestones are achieved, guidance should be issued on how to maintain the Milestones.

## Strengthening, enforcement and implementation

- WCVA is broadly supportive of the 11 recommendations put forward by the Future Generations Commissioner in the [Future Generations Report 2025](#).
- The Act should be reformed to grant the Commissioner greater powers. Consideration should be given to including tools for enforcement, incentives for compliance, and clearer guidance on implementation. To that end, WCVA suggests reviewing the powers of other Commissioners in Wales to better understand how they have been applied and, in turn, whether such powers have had a positive impact.

- There is a need for greater and more formal scrutiny of partnership forums, such as PSBs and RPBs, in Wales to ensure they are working effectively. This can ensure the ambitions of the Act are delivered, and that all partners are contributing to the process on an equal footing.
- Expanding the powers of the Future Generations Commissioner to have a greater oversight of how public bodies conduct public engagements in relation to the Act would help build public trust.

## A HEALTHIER WALES

- 9) Pivoting towards preventative health and care services is vital. As the recent report from the Auditor General noted: *‘The health system in particular has some way to go in applying future generations thinking across its planning and delivery. Accelerating progress under the Act starts with prioritising prevention. Without a more systematic shift towards prevention, budgets will be exhausted, and outcomes will likely be worse.’* [We strongly support this statement. Prevention creates healthier communities, helps people live longer and healthier lives, and reduces pressure on statutory services long-term.](#) However, the voluntary sector requires sustainable long-term resourcing for it to fully play its part in the prevention agenda.
- 10) Welsh Government should ensure voluntary sector involvement with the implementation of recommendation 19 of the Commissioner’s report:

‘Public bodies and PSBs should work together, along with the private and voluntary sectors, to implement the social model of health, placemaking and the Marmot principles to improve action on the wider determinants and reduce inequalities in their area’.

- 11) We welcome that Welsh Government has already committed to [‘making Wales a Marmot nation’](#) however, the voluntary sector must be engaged on how these principles are implemented for the best chance of success.
- 12) Implementation of the Marmot principles will help communities and public bodies become more aware of the external factors which influence a person’s health. This will lead to greater equity in health and care access and more consistent person-centred delivery, as required by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act.
- 13) The voluntary sector has been at the forefront of community development for many years. It has an independent and unique role to play in supporting people and communities to thrive. Social prescribing has become more prominent across Wales. We believe it will play an important role in the implementation of the Marmot principles. However, as awareness of social prescribing grows, so does demand. The voluntary organisations accepting referrals often struggle with capacity and resource. Community and grassroots organisations need consistent and reliable funding to ensure the services they provide are stable and resilient.
- 14) We ask the Welsh Government to communicate to local authorities the importance of community involvement in the success of the Act,

stressing the need for genuine co-production (not just consultation) in the development of services. Co-production of services can help shift the power dynamic in favour of communities and create citizen-friendly, equitable services, as per the Marmot Principles.

- 15) The Future Generations Commissioner has spoken about aligning the Well-being Indicators of public bodies better with the Act. This would help create a more cohesive application of the Act, so would be welcomed.

## **A WALES OF COHESIVE COMMUNITIES**

- 16) We were pleased to see that the National Milestone to increase the percentage of people who volunteer by 10% has been reached. This is a clear example of where the Act has been successfully implemented. We cannot assume that the current level of volunteering will be maintained into 2050. Efforts must now be focused on maintaining and expanding the number of people volunteering in Wales. Guidance should be issued to ensure that public bodies are aware of the need to maintain goals once they are achieved.

- 17) Evidence from the [National Survey for Wales](#) shows that there are particular groups, such as younger people and disabled people, who are less likely to be volunteers. Future efforts should focus on the full implementation of the [New Approach To Volunteering In Wales](#), which would make volunteering accessible to underrepresented groups and ensure we maintain or even exceed the 2050 target.

- 18) A lack of trust within communities has played a role in undermining the successful implementation of the Act. We support the call by the Future Generations Commission to do more to improve trust in public bodies.
- 19) We believe that the voluntary sector can play a crucial role in building trust by bridging the gap between citizens and decision-makers. Being closer to the ground and embedded in communities puts the voluntary sector in a unique position to help build this trust. However, public bodies often misunderstand what the voluntary sector does in this space.
- 20) Sector partners expressed frustration over approaches to community engagement and how they felt this undermined the implementation of the Act, a representative from a voluntary sector infrastructure body told us the voluntary sector often struggles to amplify the citizen voice due to insufficient buy-in from decision-makers in public bodies. She shared that, in her experience, public bodies have been 'disrespecting community input' and were a great distance from co-producing outcomes.
- 21) Failure to properly consult with communities can undermine trust in decision makers. This lack of trust provides space in which divisive actors are able to spread misinformation, reducing cohesion and creating volatile situations. This makes communities less cohesive and equal, undermining the Goals of the Act.

- 22) Those who deliver services and engage with citizens should always adhere to the [National Principles for Public Engagement](#), as endorsed by Welsh Government. There is insufficient evidence that the Principles are widely adhered to.
- 23) There is scope to expand the powers of the Future Generations Commissioner to have greater oversight of how public bodies conduct public engagements in relation to the Act. This will strengthen the implementation of the Act and support public bodies in meeting the Act's Goals.
- 24) There is a clear need to provide a more prescriptive framework for public bodies to contribute towards A Wales of Cohesive Communities. We believe a co-produced communities policy is the first step.

## **COLLABORATION AND INVOLVEMENT**

- 25) Collaboration is one of the Five Ways of Working outlined under the Act and is essential for the implementation and realisation of its Goals. We are concerned about the inconsistency in engagement with the voluntary sector. Voluntary organisations enjoy strong working links with public bodies in some parts of Wales, but this is not the case everywhere. We fear this is undermining the implementation of the Act. For the Act to be a success, more needs to be done to foster consistent partnership working across Wales. Reform to the powers of the Commissioner and the Act in this area should focus on the sharing of best practice, strengthening the role

of the voluntary sector, and ensuring consistent buy-in from all partners to the ambitions of the Act.

26) We are also told that in some forums, such as Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) and Public Services Boards (PSBs), partner organisations were not fully committed to the collaborative process that is expected by the Act. Jess Bickerton, CEO of the Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS), reflected that some public bodies attending PSB meetings do not fully engage in the discussions within the PSB. [She pointed to the annual report of the Pembrokeshire PSB, which highlighted these concerns](#). The failure of some partners to contribute in forums such as PSBs can be a barrier to the successful implementation of the Act. This may reflect a lack of understanding of what is required under the Act by public bodies.

27) There is scope to look at where the Act is working more effectively and share best practice across Wales. There is a need for greater, formal scrutiny of partnership forums in Wales to ensure they are working effectively. This will help strengthen the enforcement of the Act. In turn, the ambitions of the Act will be understood and all partners should be contributing to the process on an equal footing.

## **FINANCE AND STABILITY**

28) As noted in [our response](#) to the 2020 consultation on barriers to successful implementation of the Act, we advocate for the development of funding streams dedicated to specific Well-being Goals (selected with consultation and engagement). We believe this would provide a focal point for partners to work towards. It would

also act as a catalyst for developing more formal partnerships across sectors to realise those Goals.

29) Sector partners told us about the impact of short-term funding on the ability to meet the Goals of the Act. Jess Bickerton, CEO of PAVS, highlighted how short-term funding had undermined the potential long-term preventive impact of several pieces of work. She stated that *'there is no scope to either continue or replicate the work'*. The short-term nature of many funding streams often prevents service providers from making decisions now which are designed to produce benefits in the longer term. This is the antithesis of the Goals of the Act and plays a major role in undermining its successful implementation.

30) When public bodies and other funders consider the resourcing of the voluntary sector, they must adhere to the recently updated [Code of Practice for Funding the Third Sector](#) to help ensure these services are truly sustainable. Short-term funding arrangements create instability for voluntary organisations, their staff and their volunteers, contributing to staff leaving their roles and services being forced to close. Sticking to the Code of Practice can help prevent this.

31) Challenges have also been cited around the funding of prevention-focused activities and how this is not in-keeping with the principles of the Act. Heidi Bennet, CEO of BAVO (Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations), pointed to issues she had encountered with ring-fenced prevention-based funding: *'20% of the RIF is intended to be ringfenced for voluntary sector providers. However,*

*there is a concern that ringfenced amounts are sometimes interpreted as a maximum rather than a minimum level of funding.'* She went on to add that it was not always clear how effectively ring-fenced funding was used for preventive activities. It is for these reasons that while we are supportive of the Future Generations Commissioners' recommendation for ring-fenced preventive funding, it must come with clear guidelines and oversight to ensure the funding has the appropriate preventive impact.

## **A MORE EQUAL WALES**

- 32) There are currently no links between the LGBTQ+ Action Plan and the Future Generations Act, which can only be detrimental to several Well-being Goals, including, but not limited to, A Healthier Wales, A Wales of Cohesive Communities and A More Equal Wales. The connections between these two pieces of work must more tangible to ensure that the LGBTQ+ Action Plan can, as it states, *'support all LGBTQ+ people in Wales to live their fullest life: to be healthy, happy and feel safe'*. Some work to update the Action Plan and reform the Act in this area would be prudent.
- 33) However, we are pleased that the Mental Health Strategy makes direct links to the Future Generations Act, including noting which performance measures in the Strategy are also the Future Generations Act's National Indicators.
- 34) We are concerned to see that the levels of loneliness in Wales remain high. We feel particular attention must be paid to the finding

that someone who is [Black, Asian, or part of a Minority Ethnic group is twice as likely to have experienced loneliness as someone who is White](#). This undermines both the ambition for A Healthier Wales, A More Equal Wales and A Wales of Cohesive Communities.

35) Engagement with the sector shows it feels there is a lack of accountability in relation to the Act. There are currently no consequences for bodies that do not take the needs of future generations into account during their decision-making. As mentioned in a previous paragraph, consideration should be given to enabling the Commissioner enforcement powers, in consultation with bodies captured under the Act.

36) There are several areas in which the Act's guidance could be strengthened to ensure greater clarity of purpose:

- There needs to be clear guidance about how it links to other areas of policy and legislation – e.g. the health and care work undertaken by Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs).
- There is a clear framework around the Seven Well-being Goals, but these do not seem to be incorporated into wider planning effectively. Further guidance on implementation of the framework may prove useful to service providers.
- The guidance should include information on how public bodies can make communities more aware of the Act, and how public bodies can be challenged to adhere to it.

## **CONCLUSION**

- 37) In sum, WCVA remains strongly supportive of the Act, its ambition and its potential to positively influence outcomes for future generations across a wide range of indicators.
- 38) We recognise, however, that the Act has not delivered transformational change on the scale originally intended
- 39) To capture that potential – and in recognising some of the fundamental challenges in its first 10-years – there is a need to strengthen elements of the Act through consideration of a range expanded powers, enforcement and meaningful implementation; a review of the powers of other Commissioners would be useful in this respect to understand how they have been applied and their impact
- 40) Without strategic reform, the Act risks further challenges in the perception of both its effectiveness and relevance in public policy-making
- 41) Notwithstanding the constructive challenge and areas for consideration cited in this response, WCVA and voluntary sector bodies across Wales remain committed to working in partnership with the Future Generations Commissioner to enable the Act to reach its full potential

42) WCVA would welcome an opportunity to discuss these matters further with Members of the Senedd or officials on request.

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