



Response to Public Accounts Committee inquiry into Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

Building Communities Trust (BCT) and this response

BCT supports community development work across Wales. We manage the Lottery-funded Invest Local programme – Wales' largest asset-based community development initiative – and run a network of over 120 community based organisations supporting learning and advocacy work.

This response is partly informed by a series of 20 events BCT ran across Wales (before the coronavirus crisis) involving over 250 people from community organisations. We asked them what would help to build stronger communities – and what the barriers were. In many of our conversations people talked directly and indirectly about the barriers and solutions to implementing the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Summary

- Despite pockets of good practice, many public bodies in Wales are still not involving local people and communities to the extent envisaged by the FGA;
- The Act and its statutory guidance provide limited direction on how, and to what extent the duty on public bodies to involve people and communities takes place, leaving it largely at the discretion of public bodies who too often go through the motions without realising real change;
- Building on the strengths and assets of local communities and their organisations is a missing link in the FGA and in wider Welsh Government policy where there is no overarching strategy for communities in Wales or a minister who is clearly responsible;
- The FGA could be implemented more successfully in the future by promoting the role of community-based organisations in the Act; improving public body understanding of the community sector; and Welsh Government better recognising the key role communities and their organisations play in improving wellbeing.

Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications

From BCTs own experience, awareness and understanding of the Act varies across the community sector in Wales, with smaller community-based organisations and groups less likely to be aware of the Act, while those working more closely with public bodies and/or who are more policy orientated appearing to be more aware of how it works and its implications.

However, in our recent conversations with a diverse spectrum of community organisations from every corner of Wales there appears to be wide ranging frustration that public bodies are not involving or collaborating with them to the extent they should or could. They often describe cross-sector relationships being characterised by poor communication, lack of trust, risk aversion, silo working and – in some cases – professional bias; indicating the Acts ‘five ways of working’ are not changing public body working practices and interactions on the ground to the extent envisaged by the Act.

These experiences are supported by wider evidence from Welsh Government’s own National Wellbeing Indicators and National Survey,¹ and a recent reviews of the Acts sustainable development principles by the Future Generations Commissioner² and Audit Wales.³

From BCTs perspective we are concerned that the duty on public bodies⁴ to involve people and communities in achieving the wellbeing goals is not being fully realised. A key reason for this is that the Act and its statutory guidance provide limited direction on how, and to what extent the ‘five ways of working’ take place, leaving it largely at the discretion of public bodies. This has the advantage of allowing for local innovation and flexibility, and the disadvantage of often allowing public bodies to go through the motions without realising real change; as experienced by many of the community organisations we talked to.

Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner.

From our perspective the support and guidance provided to public bodies by the Commissioner is not a barrier to successfully implementing the Act. If anything the

¹ National Wellbeing Indicator 23 shows that over the last 4-5 years people in Wales feel increasingly less able to influence decisions affecting their local area, [Well-being of Wales 2018-19](#), p.79. The [National Survey for Wales](#) also shows that over two-thirds of people don’t feel they have the opportunity to participate in local authority decision-making.

² Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2020) [The Future Generations Report 2020](#) found that ‘people are often being asked their view on a narrow topic, with public bodies then missing the point about what matters to people...Members of the public have raised concerns about how involved they feel in things that affect them - it is identified as a consistent theme in letters I receive...People feel they have been involved after decisions are made’ p.87

³ Audit Wales May 2020 [examination of the sustainable development principles](#) found that ‘public bodies are often not creating opportunities for citizens to be involved from the early stages of design through to evaluation and they need to do more to involve the full diversity of the population’, p.42

⁴ WBFGA, 2015, Section 5: [The sustainable development principle](#), ‘A public body must take account of the importance of involving other persons with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and of ensuring those persons reflect the diversity of the population’

Commissioners own guidance to public bodies interprets aspects of the Act as taking an asset-based approach to working with communities where public bodies create the conditions where people and communities can be more involved and do the things that matter to them.⁵

However, this is fundamentally undermined by the Acts core statutory guidance which – despite rhetoric around involvement – focuses on engaging people in a more consultative capacity to shape services in line with their needs not their strengths (a deficit approach). This is more in-line with the core reality of the Act while the Commissioners guidance is more of an aspiration which too often is not realised.

The leadership role of the Welsh Government.

Building on the strengths and assets of local communities is a missing link in the Future Generations Act and in Welsh Government policy, with public bodies' duty to involve people and communities not clearly and consistently defined or properly resourced and realised.

In the context of communities, the barriers to the Act realising its ambitions for greater involvement and collaboration are exacerbated by Welsh Government having no overarching strategy for communities in Wales or a minister who is clearly responsible.

This lack of vision at a policy level, alongside a shared understanding of how Government work with communities and local community-based organisations, we believe is a major barrier to successfully implementing the Act.

Any other barriers to successful implementation of the Act

Lack of emphasis on working with community organisations in the FGA is a key barrier to its successful implementation and achieving its goals of improved involvement and wellbeing.

However, in our recent conversations with community organisations across Wales many identified encouraging signs that the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (SSWBA) is proving more effective at realising similar goals to the FGA by placing clearer and stronger duties on public bodies to promote the development of user-led services and community organisations.⁶ Considering both Acts overlap extensively in their ambition, there is an opportunity for the FGA to learn from the SSWBA section 16 duties to better support the development of citizen and community involvement by working more closely with community organisations.

⁵ Future Generations Commissioner, [Journey to a Wales of Cohesive Communities](#): Guidance from the Commissioner highlights the importance of public bodies' understanding and engaging the full range of assets that already exist within communities. She also provides examples of how they can act as enablers of community action locally, building on existing assets and stimulating greater community involvement.

⁶ [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act section 16 duty](#) on local authorities to 'promote social enterprises, co-operatives, user led services and the third sector' and the core principles in the Act for public bodies to focus on well-being, people, partnership and prevention.

How to ensure that the Act is implemented successfully in the future.

The Future Generations Acts ambition of improving well-being through public bodies working better with citizens is fundamentally undermined by its inability to fully understand, support and collaborate with local communities and their organisations.

Below we outline three key steps and policy recommendations to help address this issue and aid the successful implementation of the Act in the future:

1. Legislate to strengthen community involvement and collaboration
 - Include a new duty in the Future Generations Act for public bodies to promote the role of community organisations and development of community-run social infrastructure (modelled on the section 16 duty in the Social Services and Wellbeing Act).
 - Public Services Boards should be required to map local community-run infrastructure as part of their assessment of local well-being and collaborate more with existing community organisations.
 - Introduce new legislation enhancing community organisations' right to buy, lease, manage or use land and buildings belonging to public bodies (modelled on parts of the Scottish Community Empowerment Act).
2. Develop Welsh Government's communities' policy and funding to help achieve the Acts 'five ways of working'
 - Develop a Minister-led strategy for building stronger communities, which draws on the expertise of existing community organisations and aims to realise the 'five ways of working' in the Future Generations Act.
 - Create a £5m Communities Challenge Fund (based on the Foundational Economy model) to test ways for developing coproduction, collaboration and mutual understanding between communities, their organisations and public bodies.
 - Introduce a new National Well-being Indicator, measuring community-run social infrastructure by local authority area.
3. Improve knowledge, understanding and best practice of how communities can successfully support implementation of the Future Generations Act
 - The Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee should carry out an inquiry into the barriers and opportunities to community action in Wales.
 - Develop good practice frameworks and shared learning opportunities for public bodies on collaborative working and building stronger communities through co-production and involvement in partnership with the WLGA and Audit Wales.