

# The Well-being of Future Generations Act

Research Briefing

June 2026



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This briefing summarises the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It explains how the Act embeds sustainable development in public decision-making through well-being goals, duties on public bodies, and the ‘five ways of working’.

It outlines key delivery mechanisms, including Public Services Boards, well-being objectives, and national indicators, and highlights the oversight roles of the Future Generations Commissioner and Auditor General.





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## 1. The Act

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 ('the Act') received Royal Assent in April 2015, Most of its provisions came into force from 1 April 2016. The Act is concerned with improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. It aims to put sustainable development at the centre of decision-making, and is designed to ensure actions meet the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Act defines sustainable development as:

*The process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the well-being goals.*

## The seven well-being goals

The Act puts in place seven well-being goals for Wales:

### **A prosperous Wales**

An innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment and therefore uses resources efficiently and proportionately (including acting on climate change); and which develops a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing fair work.

### **A resilient Wales**

A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).

### **A healthier Wales**

A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised and in which choices and behaviours that benefit future health are understood.

### **A more equal Wales**

A society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio economic background and circumstances).

### **A Wales of cohesive communities**

Attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.

### **A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language**

A society that promotes and protects culture, heritage and the Welsh language, and which encourages people to participate in the arts, and sports and recreation.

### **A globally responsible Wales**

A nation which, when doing anything to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, takes account of whether doing such a thing may make a positive contribution to global well-being.

## 2. Public bodies

The Act ~~places a well-being duty~~ on public bodies to set and publish objectives to show how they will achieve the vision for Wales set out in the well-being goals. The bodies are required to maximise their contribution to delivering each of the well-being goals. Public bodies must take action to make sure they meet the objectives they set. The costs of delivering the Act's requirements need to be met by public bodies.

There are ~~currently 55 public bodies~~ subject to the Act, following the it's ~~extension to a further eight~~ in 2024 and the transfer of the ~~Centre for Digital Services Ltd~~ back into the Welsh Government in March 2026. The public bodies ~~currently identified in the Act~~ are:

- The Welsh Ministers;
- Local authorities;
- Corporate Joint Committees;
- Local Health Boards;
- Velindre National Health Service Trust;
- Public Health Wales;
- Welsh Ambulances Services University NHS Trust;
- Digital Health and Care Wales;
- Health Education and Improvement Wales;
- Welsh National Park Authorities;
- Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities;
- Natural Resources Wales;
- The Commission for Tertiary Education and Research;
- The Arts Council of Wales;
- The Sports Council for Wales;
- The National Library of Wales;

- The National Museum of Wales;
- Social Care Wales
- Welsh Revenue Authority;
- Transport for Wales; and
- Qualifications Wales.

Future legislation may result in more bodies becoming subject to the Act and some further bodies are already due to be added. For example, the Disused Mine and Quarry Tips (Wales) Act 2025 and the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026 will result in the Disused Tips Authority and Office of Environmental Governance Wales becoming subject to the Act once the respective bodies are established.

Although not designated as ‘public bodies’, any Town or Community Council (TCC) with income or expenditure greater than £200k for each of the three financial years preceding the year in which the local well-being plan (see section 3) is published is required to work towards the implementation of the local well-being plan for its area.

## The sustainable development principle and five ways of working

The Act puts in place a ‘sustainable development principle’ that sets out how public bodies should go about meeting their duties. Acting in accordance with the sustainable development principle means that the body must act in a manner that seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

There are five things that public bodies need to take into account to show they have applied the sustainable development principle. These are known as the ‘five ways of working’:

- **Long-term:** The importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs;
- **Prevention:** How acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse may help public bodies meet their objectives;
- **Integration:** Considering how the public body’s well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, on its other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies;

- **Collaboration:** Considering how acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the public body itself) could help the public body meet its well-being objectives; and
- **Involvement:** The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area which the public body serves.

In order to support public bodies, and others such as public services boards (PSBs - see section 3), to implement the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working, the Welsh Government has published a suite of guidance. The Future Generations Commissioner (see section 5) also provides support, including tools to help embed the Act,

## Well-being objectives

All public bodies are required to set well-being objectives, and are encouraged to ensure that corporate planning becomes the mechanism for the setting these.

At the same time as publishing objectives, a public body must also publish a well-being statement. The statement must explain:

- why the public body considers that its well-being objectives will contribute to the well-being goals;
- why the public body considers that its well-being objectives have been set in accordance with the sustainable development principle;
- the steps to be taken to meet the well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle;
- how the public body will govern itself to meet its well-being objectives;
- how the public body will keep the steps it takes to meet its well-being objectives under review;
- how the public body will ensure that resources, including financial, are allocated annually for the purpose of taking steps to meet its objectives;
- when the public body expects to meet its well-being objectives; and
- any other relevant information about the objectives.

The Welsh Government must publish its well-being objectives within six months of a Senedd election (the first set of Welsh Government well-being objectives were published in November 2016, and subsequently updated in an autumn 2017 well-being statement).

The last Welsh Government initially published its well-being objectives as part of its Programme for Government in June 2021, alongside a well-being statement. A Programme for Government: Update was published in December 2021.

Public bodies, including the Welsh Government, are required to publish annual progress reports showing how they have progressed towards meeting their well-being objectives. In doing so they must review their objectives and publish any revisions. Objectives can also be reviewed and revised at any time.

The Welsh Government's annual reports on progress towards its well-being objectives are published on its website.

### 3. Public Services Boards

The Act established Public Service Boards (PSBs) for each local authority area in Wales. PSBs replaced the predecessor Local Service Boards (LSBs). LSBs were non-statutory partnerships which aimed to provide a strategic approach to address cross-cutting issues requiring a multi-agency approach.

Two or more PSBs may agree to merge if they consider it would assist them in contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals, and can also agree to collaborate. The Welsh Ministers can also direct two or more PSBs to merge or to collaborate.

The members of each PSB must include:

- the local authority;
- the Local Health Board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area;
- the Welsh Fire and Rescue Authority for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area; and
- Natural Resources Wales.

In addition to these members, each PSB must also invite the following people and organisations to participate on the Board:

- the Welsh Ministers;
- the Chief Constable for a police area any part of which falls within the local authority area;
- the Police and Crime Commissioner for a police area any part of which falls within the local authority area;
- probation services; and
- at least one body representing voluntary organisations.

The Act also identifies a number of 'other partners' – including community councils and other public bodies. PSBs must seek advice from these bodies, and involve them to the extent 'it considers appropriate'.

PSBs can also invite anyone else who carries out a public function.

There are currently 13 PSBs established in Wales. PSBs in 14 local authority areas have opted to merge:

- Conwy & Denbighshire;
- Anglesey & Gwynedd;
- Rhondda Cynon Taf, Bridgend & Merthyr Tydfil (Cwm Taf Morgannwg PSB);
- Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire, Newport & Torfaen (Gwent PSB); and
- Wrexham & Flintshire.

The Act requires that executive arrangements by a local authority must ensure that its overview and scrutiny committee has the power to, amongst other matters, review and scrutinise the decisions and governance of PSBs, and make recommendations. The Act does not directly address scrutiny of merged PSBs, however in some cases Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees have been established.

## Local well-being plans

Each PSB must improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of its area by working to achieve the well-being goals (the 'well-being duty'). In doing so, PSBs are required to publish a local well-being plan, setting out its objectives and the steps it proposes to take to meet them. The plan must include a statement setting out, amongst other matters:

- why the PSB considers its objectives will contribute to achieving the well-being goals within its local area;
- how it has had regard to the assessment of local well-being in setting its objectives and steps to take;
- the time period within which the PSB expects to meet its objectives; and
- how any proposed steps will be taken in accordance with the sustainable development principle.

Plans must be published no later than one year after local government elections. The Act sets out a number of consultation requirements relating to well-being

plans and requires PSBs to seek the Future Generations Commissioner's advice. PSBs must publish this advice alongside the plan and must report on progress against the plan annually.

The PSB may review and revise its local objectives and plan at any time, or may be directed to do so by the Welsh Ministers.

Town and Community Councils that meet the £200k income and/or expenditure threshold have to take all reasonable steps to contribute towards the PSB's well-being plan and report annually on it.

## Assessments of local well-being

To inform the well-being plan, PSBs are required to prepare and publish an assessment of the state of economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being in its area. Well-being assessments must be published no later than one year before well-being plans are due to be published.

Again the Act sets out a number of consultation requirements. PSBs must also take a range of other statutory assessments into account when preparing well-being assessments.

The last Future Generations Commissioner published a summary of what she found when reviewing the 2022 draft well-being assessments.

## 4. National indicators and the Future Trends Report

### National indicators and milestones

The Act requires the Welsh Ministers to set national indicators to measure progress towards achieving the well-being goals. They must also set milestones, setting out what the indicators should show at certain points in the future.

The current set of 50 national indicators was laid in December 2021, with the 'first wave' of milestones also published in December 2021. A 'second wave' followed in 2022.

The Welsh Government is required to publish an annual well-being report – the 'Well-being of Wales' report - setting out progress made towards the achievement of the well-being goals by reference to the national indicators and milestones.

### Future Trends Report

The Act requires the Welsh Government to publish a Future Trends Report during the twelve months following a Senedd election. This must set out the likely future trends in the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales, and any related data considered appropriate.

The Future Generations Commissioner must take account of the Future Trends Report in preparing the future generations report (see below), and PSBs must refer to it in preparing their assessment of local well-being to the extent that it is relevant to its area.

Two future trends reports have been published to date, the first in 2017 and the second in 2021.

## 5. The Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

The Act requires the Welsh Ministers, after consultation with the responsible Senedd Committee, to appoint a Future Generations Commissioner for Wales. The Commissioner has a 'general duty' to:

- promote the sustainable development principle by acting as a guardian of the interests of future generations in Wales and encouraging public bodies to take greater account of the long-term impact of what they do; and
- monitor and assess the extent to which public bodies' well-being objectives are being met.

The Commissioner holds office for a seven year period. Sophie Howe was commissioner between 2016 and 2023, and has been followed by Derek Walker who took up the post on 1 March 2023.

The Commissioner has a number of roles and can undertake a number of actions, including:

- **Advising, encouraging and promoting:** The Commissioner can provide advice to public bodies and PSBs, promote awareness of the steps they need to take, and encourage them to collaborate with each other and others, and to apply best practice, to meet their well-being objectives.
- **Research:** The Commissioner may carry out research, including into the well-being goals, the national indicators and milestones, and the application of the sustainable development principle.
- **Carrying out reviews:** The Commissioner may conduct a review of how public bodies apply the Act, and how they are taking account of the long-term impact of their decisions.
- **Making recommendations:** The Commissioner can make recommendations to a public body about the steps it has taken or proposes to take to set and then meet its well-being objectives. Public bodies must take all reasonable steps to follow the recommendations made by the Commissioner.

- **Preparing a Future generations report:** The Commissioner must publish a future generations report within the 12 month period before a Senedd election. This must set out the Commissioner's assessment of the improvements public bodies should make to set and meet well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle. Two future generations reports have been published, [the first in 2020](#) and the [second in 2025](#). and
- **Establishing an Advisory Panel:** The Commissioner is supported by a panel providing advice on the exercise of their functions. The Panel includes the other Welsh Commissioners, the Chief Medical Officer for Wales, a representative of Natural Resources Wales, Wales TUC and Welsh business. The Commissioner may invite others to attend and Welsh Ministers can appoint new members.

The power to conduct a review into the extent to which a public body is safeguarding the ability of future generations to meet their needs (known as a 'section 20 review') is the Commissioner's strongest power.

The first Commissioner conducted two section 20 reviews:

- [procuring well-being in Wales](#) (2020), which considered how far the Act has informed procurement decisions by public bodies; and
- [a government fit for future generations](#) (2022), which considered how the Welsh Government implements the Act.

The current Commissioner [told the Sixth Senedd's Equality and Social Justice Committee](#) in February 2026 that he intended to announce the next section 20 review after the May Senedd election, following the publication of the new Programme for Government.

## 6. The Auditor General for Wales

Under the Act, the Auditor General for Wales (AGW) may carry out examinations of public bodies to assess:

*...the extent to which a body has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when;*

*a. Setting well-being objectives, and*

*b. Taking steps to meet those objectives.*

Additionally, the AGW must examine each public body at least once in each Senedd electoral cycle, presenting a report on the examinations within the 12 month period before a Senedd election. Two such reports have been produced to date, the first in 2020 and the second in 2025.

In carrying out an examination, the AGW must take into account any advice or assistance given to the public body, or any review and recommendations made to the body, by the Future Generations Commissioner.

Given similarities and links between their roles, the AGW and the Commissioner have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).