

Background

In 2015 the Welsh Assembly Government passed the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) and appointed [Sophie Howe](#) as the first Future Generations Commissioner for Wales in 2016.

The Commissioner is *'the guardian of the interests of future generations in Wales'*. Her remit is outlined in the 2015 Act and embedded in Welsh law. It aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of the people of Wales and ensure that the decisions of today will benefit the future generations of Wales. It *'seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*.

A cross party campaign has now been launched led by Lord Bird proposing a UK version of the Bill.

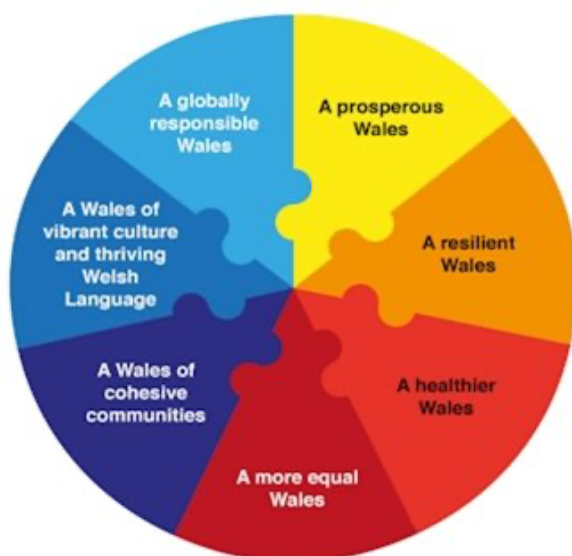
The What and Why

The Welsh Assembly Government identified a need to get policy makers to think long term about their decisions, moving beyond election cycles to consider the generations of the future and the cost that they pay as a result of decisions made today

The Act legislates that 44 public bodies in Wales must work together to consider the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

The Act takes into account the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the actions of Wales to address the climate change. There are 7 wellbeing goals that all of the public bodies must work towards. Each public body must set and publish their own wellbeing objectives to show how they are incorporating these goals in their work.

The 7 Wellbeing Goals of Welsh Public Bodies:



The 7 wellbeing goals are being met through 5 ways of working to ensure that public bodies demonstrate the 'Sustainable Development Principle'.

- **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 their other objectives, or on the objectives of other public bodies
- **Collaboration** - Acting in collaboration with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives
- **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 body serves.

The 44 public bodies include:

- Welsh Ministers
- Local Authorities
- Local Health Boards
- Public Health Wales NHS Trust
- Velindre NHS Trust
- National Park Authorities
- Fire and Rescue Authorities
- Natural Resources Wales
- The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- The Arts Council of Wales
- Sports Council of Wales
- National Library of Wales
- National Museum of Wales

This initiative was named by the Royal Society of Public Health as one of the [Top 20 public health achievements of the 21st century](#).

Recent developments

In October 2019, [Progress towards Wellbeing Future generations act](#) was published by the Commissioner who worked closely with the Auditor General for Wales and Wales Audit Office. One of the findings highlighted that more collaborative working needs to take place amongst the public bodies: *'In many cases, during 2017/18, they appear to be pieces of a jigsaw that don't fit into the wider puzzle of the organisational approach'*.

As the public bodies are required to publish their wellbeing objectives *'in April 2017 this amounted to 345 wellbeing goals'*.

There is currently variation in how public bodies are applying the Future Generations Act. It was found that the Act was *'not sufficiently funded by the Welsh Government and funding streams are disconnected from the Act'*.

There has been criticism [about the legislation and its legal power](#). Whilst the Act has also been ['hailed by the UN as a model piece of legislation for sustainable development'](#).

Commissioner Sophie Howe was a fierce critic of Wales' [largest proposed infrastructure project, the M4 bypass](#), which was scrapped in June 2019.

'Ms Howe lacked the statutory powers to block the project, but said she believed the legislation and her vocal opposition were significant factors in the government's final decision'.

In 2020 there will be the first Welsh Future Generations Leadership Academy where delegates from 14 organisations will take part in this 10-month leadership development programme.

Key features of the programme include:

- Reverse Mentoring for current leaders to learn and upskill from future leaders
- Workshops such as Future Trends and Influencing Others
- Leadership Summer School
- Internship opportunity with a public body in Wales

A new UK Future Generations Act proposed

Many countries around the world have been looking at this Act with interest. A cross party campaign being led by Lord Bird and the Big Issue is proposing a UK version of the Bill. [In early 2020 Lord Bird](#) introduced draft legislation at Westminster and it secured the backing of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Future Generations.

The Bill is based on the [Well-being of Future Generations Act](#) 2015 and proposes a UK Future Generations Commissioner. The Campaign is called [#Todayfortomorrow](#) and [the Bill](#) is due to have its second reading on 13th March 2020.

The Wellbeing of Future Generations Bill will require the UK Government to:

1. Work to prevent problems, including the climate crisis and poverty, from happening, and not just deal in emergencies
2. Give current and future generations a voice in decision-making, and protect them from global threats
3. Deliver a new, sustainable vision for the nation that prioritises our environmental, social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

The stated aim of Lord Bird's bill is *"to revolutionise how laws and budgets are made in the UK by requiring policies to enhance the environmental, economic, social and cultural wellbeing of current and future generations"*.

What does this mean for Scotland?

Lord Bird's Bill is UK wide. This would affect reserved policy areas and may also have some effect on devolved matters, for example, through budget consequential.

Although Scotland doesn't currently have a Future Generations Act, [the National Performance Framework](#) has focussed public bodies on many aspects of sustainable development, however there is often still a disconnect between the actions and words of the Scottish Government.

A new UK Future Generations Act may help focus minds during cross-sector conversations. For instance, lots of money is going into restoring peat bogs to prevent the release of carbon, however peat is still being extracted at a faster rate than it is restored. Campaigns to encourage gardeners to choose peat free compost are having limited impact due to the wide availability of the product.

The economy will undoubtedly change as a result of the climate emergency. There will be lots of difficult conversations about choices, individually and as a country. Business as usual will not be an option for the economy as so many industries are affected by changing climate patterns and availability of resources.

A Future Generations Act has the potential to help frame the public conversation so individual policies sit within a bigger framework which makes the direction of travel clear - ensuring that the decisions made today benefit and will not harm the future generations of Scotland and beyond.

Further reading and listening:

- The future generations Commissioner for Wales: <https://futuregenerations.wales>
- The today for tomorrow campaign: <https://todayfortomorrow.org.uk>
- Meet the world's first 'minister for future generations'
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/02/meet-the-worlds-first-future-generations-commissioner>
- [Future First BBC radio 4](#)
- <https://futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FINAL-Progress-towards-the-Well-being-of-Future-Generations-Act.pdf>
- [https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/My-Council/Strategies,-plans-and-policies/Corporate-strategies,-plans-and-policies/The-Well-being-of-Future-Generations-\(Wales\)-Act](https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/My-Council/Strategies,-plans-and-policies/Corporate-strategies,-plans-and-policies/The-Well-being-of-Future-Generations-(Wales)-Act)
- One young world <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBfLOCQb9x4>
- Key note lecture <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLYcttv7FOc>