

Senedd Cymru Public Accounts Committee
Inquiry into Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Public Health Wales' written evidence on
'Barriers to the successful implementation of the Act'

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This written submission is made to the Senedd's Public Accounts Committee prior to Public Health Wales' evidence session on 11th January 2021. The submission sets out Public Health Wales' views on the barriers to the successful implementation of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- 1.2 Public Health Wales exists to protect and improve health and well-being and reduce health inequalities for people in Wales. We work locally, nationally and, with partners, across communities with the aim of achieving a healthier future for Wales. Our seven strategic priorities/well-being objectives are: Influencing the wider determinants of health; Improving mental well-being and building resilience; Promoting healthy behaviours; Securing a healthy future for the next generation through a focus on early years; Protecting the public from infection and environmental threats to health; Supporting the development of a sustainable health and care system focused on prevention and early intervention; and Building and mobilising knowledge and skills to improve health and well-being across Wales.
- 1.3 As the national public health institute for Wales, Public Health Wales has played a key role in supporting the public, the Welsh Government, and the wider system during our unprecedented health protection response to the coronavirus pandemic. We have provided system leadership through specialist and expert public health advice; through timely information and intelligence; and by supporting key elements of the Welsh Government's Test Trace Protect Strategy.
- 1.4 We have also undertaken significant work around the wider implications of COVID-19 on population health, such as mental health and well-being, which has been developed through key areas of work including our National Public Engagement Survey, along with wider research, evaluation and international horizon scanning. In parallel to this work, essential public health services and functions have gradually been reactivated.
- 1.5 Public Health Wales' health protection response has involved the mobilisation of the full weight of the organisation's resources. It has been our highest priority since early 2020 and will remain so as the pandemic and our response evolves through the remainder of the year and into 2021.

2. Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications

- 2.1 Public Health Wales recognises the Act is pivotal to improving population health and well-being, and tackling health inequalities. We believe that the Act has provided us with the framework for adopting a more transformational approach to the way we work.
- 2.2 To help us achieve the fundamental shift required by the Act, in 2016 we established the Health and Sustainability Hub. The purpose of the Hub is to support us internally to effectively embed the five ways of working and the goals within the Act. Externally, the Hub also provides support for our partners in implementing the Act and informing and supporting sustainable policy development and cross-sector working. The Hub supports the organisation through five broad areas of work:
- *Leading and informing*, for example, setting up the Procurement Champions internal working group to ensure that sustainability is a key part of Public Health Wales' work.
 - *Increasing reach and impact, with a collaborative approach* – for example the Hub led on the development of a Memorandum of Understanding with Natural Resources Wales, to enable greater collaboration and add value to existing ways of working.
 - *Development and innovation* – for example supporting a climate change Health Impact Assessment to identify the positive and negative impacts of climate change, the populations who may be affected, and any potential opportunities for the future.
 - *Monitoring and reporting* – for example working with the Future Generations Commissioner and Auditor General to evidence how Public Health Wales embedded the sustainable development principle in developing its long-term strategy and well-being objectives.
 - *Working with key stakeholders in Wales and Europe* – for example being a partner in the Joint Action on Health Equity Europe (JAHEE) Programme, working with European Partners to share information about embedding the Health in All Policies approach through the Act.
- 2.3 Our organisational processes enable the ways of working to be embedded in work programmes and projects across the organisation, and we capture our work on sustainable development as part of our organisational performance reporting.
- 2.4 To support our implementation of the Act, in 2017 we carried out a staff survey to measure awareness, understanding and engagement with the Act. At the time, we identified that 23% of staff were confident they understood what the Act meant for their role and the organisation and 56% of staff felt they were 'active advocates for the Act and had opportunities to apply the Act. The survey also provided us with insight as to the extent staff felt Public Health Wales demonstrated the five ways of working and we also identified that there was good understanding of the Act within our key corporate functions. We repeated this

survey in February 2020 to understand whether the Act was understood and embedded within the organisation. Of those that responded, 88% had an awareness of the Act and over three quarters had heard of the sustainable development principle. With regards to the five ways of working, staff reported that they felt progress had been made since the last survey in all five areas, with the greatest progress being made in relation to 'long-term'.

2.5. A range of Public Health Wales work is reflected in the Commissioner's 'Future Generations Report', including:

- The 'Our Space' project where 550 staff were transferred from 10 locations across South East Wales to No.2 Capital Quarter, Cardiff into a 'sustainable and collaborative workspace', with substantial carbon-savings
- The development of 'Be the Change' e-guides to help public bodies and their staff contribute to Wales' well-being goals through 'sustainable steps' in the workplace
- The internal environmental sustainability programme to promote sustainable working and reduce the organisation's carbon footprint
- WHO Collaborating Centre Directorate's work on 'Investment for Health and Well-being', including work with Oxfam Cymru on global citizenship training for health professionals
- Relationship with Arts Wales towards more integrated and collaborative work on culture and health in Wales

3. The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed

3.1 Public Health Wales has been using the resources of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner (e.g. self-reflection exercise and 'Art of the Possible'), Wales Audit Office (e.g. workshop on applying the sustainable development principle), and Welsh Government (e.g. guidance on Biodiversity Duty and decarbonisation of Welsh public sector).

3.2 Public Health Wales has also developed 'Be the Change' resources to target individual and team level behaviour change in the workplace. These resources have also helped to further raise awareness of the Act and have been shared with partner organisations.

4. Support provided to public bodies by the Future Generations Commissioner

4.1 Public Health Wales has benefited from the resources of the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner (as highlighted above). The organisation is also collaborating with the Commissioner on several areas of work, for example a joint post that supports long-term ways of working. Public Health Wales has also

participated in the Office's conferences and roundtable meetings for public bodies and wider stakeholders on a variety of themes, as well as producing resources in collaboration, such as a [Three Horizons toolkit](#). We have also supported the Commissioner's cross-sector Future Generations Leadership Academy, providing young people with opportunities to enhance their skills and develop a pool of future young leaders in Wales.

5. The leadership role of the Welsh Government

- 5.1 Welsh Government policies are framed around and aligned to the Act. Together with other legislation in Wales, such as the Public Health Act, the Social Services and Well-being Act and the Planning Act, we believe that Wales has an enabling policy context to protect and improve the health and well-being of the people of Wales.
- 5.2 Through *Prosperity for All*, Welsh Government has set out its commitment to health in all policies, by addressing the wider social and economic influences on health and well-being, such as education and employability, parenting and housing. *A Healthier Wales* provides a whole system approach to health and well-being, including on preventing illness, aligning to the seven well-being goals and the sustainable development principle.
- 5.3 Public Health Wales has utilised resources and guidance produced by Welsh Government to help us embed the Act. For example, we have followed Welsh Government guidance in developing our biodiversity plan (in response to the Environment (Wales) Act). Public Health Wales continues to monitor guidance and support being produced for public bodies to contribute to Welsh Government's low carbon plan, '*Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales*'.

6. Any other barriers to successful implementation of the Act (e.g. Brexit, Covid-19, etc.)

6.1 COVID-19

- 6.1.1 Since February 2020, Public Health Wales' priority (along with that of other public bodies, including Health Boards) is the acute response to COVID-19 to protect population health and well-being. As a result, the organisation needs to reflect on what is feasible in the coming months and years, including around supporting the wider health-system in Wales to implement and embed the Act.

However, in organisational recovery Public Health Wales will ensure it embeds the sustainable development principle and advocates (and practices) a green and fair recovery.

6.2 Brexit

- 6.2.1 In January 2019, Public Health Wales published a [health impact assessment](#) of 'Brexit', which examines the potential effects on the short, medium and long-term health and well-being of people living in Wales. Ongoing uncertainty around Brexit could have significant impacts on population well-being and further compound the effects of the pandemic. The Act provides a framework to support Brexit (and pandemic) response and recovery, although this is problematic with current staff capacity focusing on acute pandemic response.

6.3 Short-term planning and financial cycles

- 6.3.1 Planning and financial cycles need to include a long-term focus, with clear milestones to improve accountability. This should also create more opportunities for collaborative working. In response to the Act, Public Health Wales developed a [long term strategy](#) covering 2018-30 and bringing together seven strategic priorities to improve health and well-being and reduce health inequalities.

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

- 7.1 In light of COVID-19, it may be necessary to revisit reporting (cross-legislation) and programme requirements (e.g. Office of the Future Generations Commissioner work-streams) on public bodies, to enable (much more limited) capacity to be directed towards responding to the Act, including acting upon the recommendations in reports to-date by the Commissioner and Auditor.
- 7.2 In collaboration with Kingston University, we recently published '[Implementing the Sustainable Development Principle](#)', which identified five evidence based recommendation to implement the five ways of working and achieve the well-being goals, as well as five daily practices to use as individuals, within teams, across organisations and systems.
- 7.3 Public Health Wales continues to work to embed the culture change required to implement the Act successfully. Through a recent staff survey, we have identified opportunities such as further raising understanding and awareness of team roles and contributions to the Act; strengthening our multi-agency working to develop longer term, collaborative projects that are innovative, more integrated and more focused on the needs of our population; and developing further resources around the social, cultural and economic aspects of sustainability, whilst continuing our work on environmental sustainability.
- 7.4 It is important to make a compelling case for investing in prevention to produce the best possible outcomes, utilising the strengths and assets which people and places have to contribute, including local communities. In 2016, Public Health Wales set out research evidence and expert opinion in support of preventing ill health and reducing inequalities in its '[Making a Difference](#)' report. Public Health Wales continues to undertake work to support investment in prevention, through the work of the WHO Collaborating Centre on Investment for Health and Well-being.